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THE WAY UP

1. Fiction, English

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THE WAY UP

"Montrez l'homme à mes yeux ; honteux de m'ignorer
Dans mon être, dans moi, je cherche à pénétrer ;
Mais quelle épaisse nuit voile encore la nature."

—VOLTAIRE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

WIDDICOMBE

A MAN OF GENIUS

THE WINGLESS VICTORY

THE WAY UP

BY

M. P. WILLCOCKS

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY, MCMX
LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD

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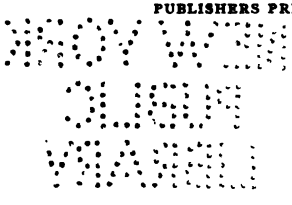

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Part One

THE WAY UP

CHAPTER I

CRABBÈD AGE AND YOUTH

At the window of a room on the second story of the Half-Moon Hotel, Exminster, a youth stood looking down on the street below. Behind him, at the dinner table he had just left, sat an elderly man with rough-hewn features and massive head, under whose weighty hand the firmest resolve had a habit of assuming the draggled air of a butterfly foolishly trying to fly with a broken wing.

It was to escape from the sense of this that Michael Strode had turned his attention for a moment to the crowds on the pavement of the ancient High Street of a town that has in its time played many parts. Just now, though in blindest ignorance of its rôle, the eager rush of surging life was helping to stir up the faggots of that eternal bonfire on which youthful enthusiasm has always made a practice of offering up the vain ideals of its forefathers—only, of course, to erect in its turn a fresh monument of vanity for the destructive zeal of the next age.

"Well," said the older man, at last breaking the silence in the room, "there are three things a wise man never meddles with—the wind, the tide, and the folly of a fool. And I reckon I'm a wise man."

"I've always heard so, Uncle Billy," said Michael, turning away from the window, "and I suppose I'm the fool. Well, so be it!"

He spoke with a recklessness due to the occasion rather than to his temperament which was more dogged than impulsive. That the two were near relatives in this, as well as in their build, was evident.

"I'm not going to try and dissuade you from what you're set on doing, but I should like to put my side to you," said the other. His speech was punctuated by sips from a glass of hot water.

Michael nodded, refraining from reminding Mr. Costelow that this course was tantamount to the action he had deprecated—interfering with the folly of a fool.

"You've been declaiming against capitalism," continued he, "at the Union and elsewhere. And you tell me you're going on doing so. Well, I've got something to say about that, for your college fees have come from my purse and your professional start was to have come from the same source. Now, I'm a capitalist. How's that, if capitalism is, what I think you called it, a fungoid growth?"

"It wasn't my phrase," said Michael quietly, "though I agree with it so far that I think capitalism's a stage we've got to grow out of."

"After it's started you in life, I presume," sneered Mr. Costelow. "Mind you, I don't grudge you a penny of it. My sister's son has a perfect right to my money, but not if capitalism's robbery."

Michael flushed a dark red, then after a slight pause during which he seemed to be listening to the crackle of the fire, he said quietly:

"Yes, it's a false position altogether that I'm in."

"I think so, too."

"Then we'll end it. I'll take no capitalist's money, and I'll start in my own way."

"Without a penny?"

"Without a penny, and with the capital and interest on it due to you for my college fees still to pay."

The old man smiled grimly.

"That last," said he, "was a bit of temper, I think."

Michael laughed, showing the strong white teeth that were just beginning to lose the porcelain colour of youth.

"Well, yes, I suppose it was," he answered candidly. Then, holding out his hand across the table, he cried:

"Uncle Billy, you've been downright good to me, but I'm in the wrong box altogether and I thank you for showing it to me."

The old man paused, pulling the wiry ends of his long

white beard through his thick fingers, while he gazed meditatively at his nephew.

"What'll you do then?" he asked at length.

"Get a job in an iron foundry if they'll take me on. Oh, I'm not so mad as I look," he exclaimed, "in that way I shall just learn a great industry from the bottom upwards, not as we usually do, in our infernal cheeky way, from the top downwards."

"You're a reversion to type, that's about the size of it," said Mr. Costelow. "My father, your grandfather that is, started in life as a blacksmith, with a capital of one pound and you're the very spit of the old man. You'll end like he did, as a foundry owner, with blast furnaces poisoning the air for miles round."

"And my biggest exploit a successful lock-out," laughed Michael. "You know," he added wistfully, "I don't want us to part in anger, for I—like you, Uncle Billy."

"Thank'ee. Very good of you, I'm sure, but after all, you *do* find quite a few decent chaps among the capitalists," said Uncle Billy with a smile.

"You haven't any sympathy with my ideas?" asked Michael, making a last effort.

"Not a pin's worth. The working man 'ud be a decent chap if you and your mates would leave him alone. As it is, he's a pest. And as far as his troubles are concerned, why, I've got a peck of 'em myself, and so have most men. Besides, earth hath no sorrows that Heaven cannot cure," he added with a nasal twang and a sneer combined, about which the sneer was the only genuine thing.

"Just so," said Michael, with such an accurate imitation of his uncle's driest manner that Mr. Costelow laughed outright, "but I think it's safer to make sure in this world, and cure as you go along."

"Is this final?" asked Mr. Costelow at length. "You're not inclined to re-consider your decision?"

"No," said Michael curtly.

At the moment to say so cost him nothing, so elated was he at the feeling that he was strong enough to stand up to the combined authority of wealth and age.

His uncle sat watching the six foot two that faced him across the table. Even on the lad's broad, muscular

shoulders, his large head with its shock of strong brown hair looked heavy in its squareness. Built for work as he was, Michael had already acquired the slight stoop and the somewhat drooping cheeks that denote great expenditure of vitality. In repose his face was melancholy, yet it could flash with fire, with the capacity for love or hate; it was above all instinct with steady forthrightness of intention. He might become iconoclast or demagogue; he was certainly even now a fighter, with a mind that matched the muscle-play that rippled in his limbs and revelled in the deftness of his sailor-like tread.

"I'll bid you good-night, then," said Mr. Costelow at last. "I shall leave for London by the first train to-morrow and you'd better be getting home now. No, I shall not come down to see your mother this time. Better not, better not."

In reality, the old man was far harder hit than Michael and as he sat over the fire when the lad was gone, he glanced regretfully over the useless past in which one of his chief pleasures had been the planning of a fine professional career for the son of his only sister, Cecilia Strode. For William Costelow was a bachelor and one of the richest cotton spinners in Manchester.

"Tchuh, tchuh, tchuh," he clucked to himself. "A fat lot of sleep I shall get to-night. Damn the boy. But it's all Cecilia's fault."

The only sound to be heard in the room was the babel of voices from the street and the fall of ashes in the grate.

CHAPTER II

YEAST

Across the High Street lay a deep shadow made by a dense crowd that clustered round the carved Elizabethan façade of a newspaper office in whose brilliant windows nothing was to be seen but blue-pencilled lists of football results. Yet every moment the press grew closer, the low humming of the voices more insistent. It was a curious note that came from that dingy mass of watchers; shrill and angry like the buzzing of a swarm of bees, a note that had nothing in common with the chatter and skirls of laughter from the chafferers and philanderers in the street beyond. With eyes glued to the panes the crowd gazed at the window and still the half savage chant continued, a bourdon of awe that might mean either pity or vengeance but was quite alien to the easy good-will of the market-place. In the glare of light the strained faces lost their individual expressions, weak, animal, or merely tired, and took on a common look of suspense. It was noticeable that the face of the policeman who marched like an automaton between the crowd and the window was the only one neither tense nor eager. On the outskirts of the main body loitered two women, a servant-maid in her evening finery of white rabbit-skin cap and collar, and a bedraggled woman pushing a barrow.

Suddenly there was a hurried movement forward and the humming note ceased, breaking into a series of short barks like pistol shots. A woman licked her dry lips nervously, as another blue-pencilled notice appeared in the window.

"The Home Secretary, after due consideration, sees no reason for reprieve in the case of the sentence of death passed on Richard Hayward for the murder of Ellen Mason. Hayward will therefore be executed on Thursday morning at Exminster gaol."

"And him not twenty," said the woman with the barrow, spitting on her hands and seizing the handles.

"Well, he shouldn't ha' killed the maid," retorted a man in a seedy frock coat. "She was a bad lot, though."

"And so was he," shouted the woman, instinctively resisting the implied difference in moral standard.

By this time the noise of the crowd had changed from the voice of doom to the mere chatter of excited gossip. The units of it scattered in different directions to carry the exciting news down side-streets and into narrow courts, for the sea of life had already closed over the head of Richard Hayward, that feeble eddy in the vast ocean of existence. Yet, up in the long brick prison with its eyeless walls and dull clock face, Richard Hayward's pulse was still ticking out its last moments against the dull automatism of the clock. And on Thursday, at eight precisely, the clock would win.

Michael Strode pushed his way out of the crowd and stood for a moment at the entrance of an alley leading from the High Street to the Cathedral Close.

Between the tall houses of every date that lined the road, the arc-lights glowed in a long ladder of whiteness whose narrowing vistas stretched down the steep hill as far as the eye could reach. Beneath the majesty of floating cloud-masses and the twinkle of peeping stars the electric tram-wires spanned the street like a shadowy gallows. Above the sweep of the night-wind sounded the clanging of the cars, the hum of many voices and the tramp of footsteps, hurrying or loitering, purposeful or aimless.

It was the end of the week and the road that had echoed to the tread of the Roman legionaries was now thronged with the crowds engaged in late marketing. At wide intervals the monotony of banks and shops was broken by the red sandstone towers of three small churches, standing dark against the glare of window-lights and the polish of plate-glass. Their rough walls, impregnated with the rain and romance of the centuries, seemed like milestones to mark the distance traversed by the history of the town; another milestone was the grey buttress of the Guildhall front that bestrode the pavement in all the majesty of weathered architraves and crumbling pillars.

Across the shops and houses Strode's fancy leapt to the prison cell from which the condemned man could hear the rush of trains carrying free people away to the sea, to distant cities, to the quiet country. Yet to Strode, Hayward was but a name in a newspaper, a mere bit of sensationalism such as a grateful journalist seizes to fill his pages. What was Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?

Nothing, indeed. But as he walked down the alley, past the dairy and the old curiosity shop, it was of Hayward that he still thought. For Michael possessed the social sense, and every now and again, quick-winged like the lightning, there would come to him the perception of the unity of life. Such a thrill, once born in a man, never dies, since it is the warp and woof of his being.

Through the faint green tracery of the elm-avenue the stars hung in clusters like golden fruit; in front of the dark mass of the Cathedral sat the stone image of a great thinker. Clear for all men to see—the worn towers, the white figure of the old divine with a wise book on his knee and the golden galaxy of the sky. The visible universe was very good, but all that the wisdom of it could offer Richard Hayward was a broken neck.

And the powers behind the visible universe? If there were any?

Michael stood gazing up at the judicious Hooker, who continued to look at him in serene, if somewhat senile dignity from his chilly perch. He, at any rate, would have been very certain that something waited for Hayward on the other side of death. He could, moreover, have thrust on Hayward himself the burden of his own misdoing.

Michael could feel neither; to him the condemned man was merely going to an unknown fate, hurled into it by the very society that had made him a murderer, by breeding him, a thing of ugly, uncontrollable passions, in one of those dark crannies of civilisation that are packed away securely where they cannot annoy the squeamish, places that merely to name is an offence to dainty ears.

Yet even now, with all his sense of kinship, Michael found himself stretching his long limbs in luxurious enjoyment of their pliant muscles, an enjoyment all the greater for the sense that another man's body was prob-

ably huddled together upon itself, crouched in an attitude of helpless fear.

He shook himself like a water-dog and strolled by another opening into the High Street once more. Between the granite pillars of the Market Hall a barrier of planks had been erected round a small movable platform with maple-wood rails. In front of it was wedged a crowd of men in greenish coats and mud-bespattered trousers listening to a white-faced, heavily-bearded man whose voice echoed through the dim spaces beyond the lighted area where he stood.

"Say to yourself," he shouted, "there is nothing in the world, no food, no clothing, no houses, no coal, but my labour and the labour of men like me created it. Think of it till it's the one thing you know; my labour made it all out of the forces of Nature. It is the one thing you have to learn and nothing else matters beside it. The wealth of the world is created by your labour and by nothing else. You don't see it of things like coal and diamonds?

"Well, I met a man at a strike meeting in 1877 who couldn't see it either. He said: 'What about capital? Surely, that ought to have a look in?' It was a strike at a coal-mine and there were two thousand men out. They were there that night before me, packed like herrings in a barrel. Said I: 'Did any coal come up from the pit yesterday?' 'No,' said he, 'for the men had struck.' 'Then,' said I, 'had the owners any less capital than they had two days ago that no coal came up?' 'No,' said he. Then I went on: 'If all their relations died to-morrow and left all their money to the owners, so that their capital was doubled, would that bring up the coal? And if the owners brought all their money in golden sovereigns and poured it down the mine, would that bring any coal up?' He was forced to confess that it wouldn't, for two men and a bucket could have brought up more coal than all the capital of all its shareholders put together. Again I say: it's your labour that produces wealth and your labour alone. Every man that's a good worker can produce three times as much as he needs for his own consumption. That's an economic fact, gainsaid by nobody. But the luckiest of you only gets one part of what he produces, the other two

parts go to the idle rich, who live in the houses you build, eat the bread you harvest, and wear the clothes you weave. And often you, the makers, have neither houses, nor bread, nor clothes. And if you have, 'tis the worst of all, that the idle rich would scorn to use."

A girl with her head wrapped in a black shawl had crept close to the barrier and with uncomprehending eyes stood rolling her glance from man to man. But no one answered her questioning gaze, since for the moment their half-patronising attention was riveted on the speaker. In this wayside Academy of economics, there was no place for that poor Venus of the Market Place. From the far corners of the dark hall the shouts of boys, the crash of overturned forms and trestles echoed between the pillars.

"But you'll say that before we can get the coal out of the mine, it has to be in it. So it is; Nature put it there for us, for all of us. And when you ask me where to get the means of production, I say—where it is, and not where it isn't. And where is it?"

His voice rose to a hoarse shout, as though he would force the people outside to come in.

"In the hands of the rich. That's where it is. And how did they get it? How did your rich man get his coal mine? Why, he or his ancestors got you to return 'em to Parliament and there they passed a law saying that a bit of England, of your England that you're to be taxed to protect, was to belong to them. Aye, swell about and strut; it *is* your England. You're to be taxed for it, that the capitalists of England may fight the capitalists of Germany. War-game, they call it, and it's played with you for pawns, for playing cards, for dice. But you mustn't own any of it, all the same, not even six feet of it, for they'll plump you down when you're cold meat, one on top of the other in a pauper's grave."

There was some scuffling round the platform, when the Socialist who presided stepped up and invited discussion. In the midst of it Michael pushed his way forward to the barrier.

"All that you've heard may be true or not," he said, "but it's only half a truth after all. Society's a big machine and you're the wheels of it. But the hands that direct the

machine know nothing of how it works, that's where the trouble comes in. Take the wheat king, for instance, he'll threaten famine at the doors of two continents with the twist of a handle, but he'll never really see a child cry for the bread he snatched from its mouth, never watch the belt tighten on a belly-pinched wretch. Only let them really see what they're doing and then the handles won't be turned so recklessly."

"We'll make 'em see," shouted a voice.

Michael was an Englishman who could shrug his shoulders. He did so now.

"I hope you will," he said, "but you've a long way to go, mates."

He stood watching for a moment the small crowd of labour-stained bodies round the Socrates of the maple-rail, for there, like leaven in the lump, the collective consciousness that is the worker's tribute to morality was already present, though as yet but in ferment and confusion.

At last, not unnoted by the Venus in the black shawl, Michael walked away. For all the mindless insolence of her roving eyes, she had soft, fair hair and tender cheeks of wild-rose sweetness.

Down the street towards the river the crowd was denser and Michael swung along between the loaded market-baskets carried by thrifty housewives to the detriment of their neighbours' thighs. The third share claimed by the worker took visible form here in the shape of joints of meat, rank cauliflowers and the stringy toughness of ancient fowls.

"Mr. Strode," said a breathless voice at his elbow. "Back from college, I presume?"

Even in this rude jostle of arms and legs and bulky bodies the speaker's regard for propriety of language was as clear as the timbre of a violin.

"Hallo, Durant, that you?" said Michael, looking down at a pale, lined face that not even the shaggy dignity of a grey imperial could make other than deprecating.

"Yes, I'm on my way home," he continued. "Going to row down to-night. Only it takes such an unconscionable time to work through all this. What with Socialists and murderers the town's pretty lively to-night."

"Oh, yes, yes. You refer to Hayward. Shocking, shocking. As I told the wife last night it really casts quite a gloom over a town to have executions going on in it. I question whether it ought to be allowed in the midst of a crowded centre of population. However, I'm glad to say they don't fly a black flag now at the moment of execution. So humane!"

"Well," said Michael with a grin, "I don't suppose a black flag makes any difference one way or the other to Hayward. He's got to be worked off, anyhow. Look here, Durrie," continued he, taking the small man's arm, "I want you to do something for me."

"Anything in my power, Mr. Strode. Anything in my power, I'm sure. I'm afraid it's too late to ask you up to our place to-night and the fact is, we're rather in a fix, with three down at once with measles. The wife—and you know what a manager she is—is really at her wit's end to know how to keep the—so to say—the ball a-rolling in the family life."

Michael flashed a smile in the face of a big policeman who looked like a good fellow that might know what measles meant in the family life.

"Very sorry to hear it, Durrie," he said kindly.

Mr. Durant was one of the meek men who beget children with the automatic zeal of a smooth-running machine or the regularity of a conscientious novelist who believes in output. Open his front door at almost any hour and a nurse would be found sitting on the stairs dandling an infant, behind the block of perambulators and mail carts that filled the front hall. Mrs. Durant, who rose with the dawn to bestir herself with the porridge, wore tight plaid blouses, red and green, and seldom opened her windows that were shaded by maroon curtains, edged with galloon braid.

"And we're such early people that really, even with a latch-key, I feel quite guilty when I'm out after ten," continued he.

"Oh, it's nothing for to-night," said Michael. "I must be getting home, too. But I want you to get your governor to let me have a look over the Phoenix Works one day."

"Over the foundry, Mr. Strode? Certainly, certainly.

No difficulty at all. I'll make a note of your request at once and speak to him about it to-morrow."

Mr. Durant's eyes twinkled gaily, as they always did whenever he encountered a small task well within his powers.

"Business methods even in small things, you know," he chirped. "Perfect regularity is my rule. A place for everything in your note-book, and everything in its place, too."

He laughed complacently, for life, apart from nursery trials, afforded him profound satisfaction. Could his infants only have been pigeon-holed and invoiced, the riddle of existence would have been solved for him, for he opened letters with a paper cutter and found his deepest joy in "desk appliances."

"What day will you visit the foundry?" he asked, as Michael stood still to take leave.

"I'll let you know later. I want to spend some time at your place. Fact is, I'm not going back to college, and—well, I'm in a pretty big ferment altogether, Durrie. But I mustn't keep you jawing here any longer. Do you think your governor would take me on as a hand, in some capacity?"

Durant glanced along the groups of warehouses and wharf-stores that edged the river towards the chimney of the foundry where he was head clerk.

"It's a fine thing, a business life," he said, as religiously as a Solemn-League and Covenanter reciting a creed, "a regular recurrence of hours that put balance into you, a regularity of duties that make the hours fly. Why, Maria often says she can set the clocks better by my key in the door at 6:25 than by all the one o'clock guns in existence. It's business that's made us the great nation we are. That's what I always say when Maria grumbles about the rates and the difficulty we experience in satisfying the Income Tax officials. 'Business,' I say, 'Maria, it's the business-instinct that makes 'em so minute. Though really, you know, it does take a gift for the higher mathematics to fill in an Income Tax paper. But good-night, Mr. Michael. You couldn't do better than embrace a business career. I shall bring all the nine up to it. I've

already purchased a typewriter for the girls to practise on."

With a laugh, Michael disappeared in search of his boat and a few minutes later was pulling with long, steady strokes down the canal towards Upham, insensibly working out, by backward heave and forward bend, the fever in his veins.

Slowly he rowed, gazing down at the canal waters, where instead of the reflections of the trees, he saw the faces of the crowd:—Durrie, the clerk, kindly and routine-made, the little servant-wench, with red-rimmed eyes, anaemic skin and the pale gold of her hair shining against the cheap fur. For some such mawkin as that had Richard Hayward's pulses throbbed.

It was of the slippery elusiveness of the evil of to-day that Michael thought, evil that is harder to grasp than ever, because so carefully hidden. Meat in the shop windows, but with the slaughter-houses carefully shut away; executions still, but scientific now and hideous with no leering crowds or guinea-seats for the show; robbery and spoliation still, but worked by a telephone-receiver and not by the jemmy or the muzzle of a pistol.

The boat was passing now between meadows, shadowy in the night stillness. Above the dip of oars and the wash of water sounded the occasional grunt of a cow. Dim lights in cottage windows were being extinguished one by one over on the other side of the river.

CHAPTER III

THE QUICK FORGE AND WORKING HOUSE OF THOUGHT

At length he rested on his oars, opposite a filmy line of waterside houses with gabled fronts full of memories of the past, of the Portugal trade, of Vancouver and the Dutch merchant-skippers who had built the town. The boat rocked slightly as Michael sat dreaming, till it seemed that cradling arms upheld him and he shivered with the sheer delight of youth in face of the unknown future that veils herself in radiant mists far brighter than the curtains of the dawn. The murmur of the tree branches sounded like the rustle of white arms, for the dreams of mortal woman and of ideal vision were becoming one in his thought.

At last he moved and moored his boat. Then walking down the causeway to the river he stood like a solitary heron and sent out a long cry that echoed up the valley:—"Ferry, ahoy!"

The windows of his home in the street on the other side were all dark, but in one upstair room of a double-gabled house next the Passage Inn there still shone a light. The festoons of brown salmon-nets that hung drying in the wind on the opposite side of the street waved to and fro, till the supporting posts creaked again.

Strode flung up a handful of sand to the lighted window and being presently admitted to the darkened hall, followed his host upstairs.

"Phew!" exclaimed Michael, striding across the room and flinging up the window with a bang, "you smell like the kitchen of a common lodging-house."

"There you're out," retorted his host returning to his interrupted task of tossing an omelet over the fire in the tall, hobbed grate, "for there's no smell of washing, nor of onions."

Michael laughed and tilted a cane-bottomed bedroom chair, in order to free the seat of it from books. Everyone who was at all intimate with Louis Aviolet acquired the tilting habit, for he invariably accumulated books and papers all round him on whatever resting place chanced to be handy. Now the displaced volumes sent up a hot smell of dust as they fell on the carpet, while Michael with raised eyebrows leant back in his chair.

"Dado quite two inches higher up all round the room," said Michael. "How your landlady ever stands it I never can conceive."

"Oh," said Louis Aviolet, "Miss Bowcher's an easy-going soul and as a lodger I give no trouble."

The walls of the room, covered with drab paper whence the pattern had long since disappeared, were surrounded by high, dusty piles of books heaped against the skirting board. Above this deposit sketches had been pinned at intervals, mostly of weirdly draped women with one long and singularly well-developed limb emerging unexpectedly from their otherwise attenuated frames. Into the corner of the room was pushed an old bedstead, piled up with the rounded hillocks of a feather bed whose valleys were filled with books that had been shot there during the process of clearing the table for supper.

Spirit-kettles and pipes covered the mantelpiece and wash-stand, for Aviolet made tea for himself at frequent intervals and liked to have a kettle handy wherever he might be at the moment. Like all houses, this bed-sitting room had its shrine, its altar of the Lares and Penates, its *cor cordium*, in this case it was the tall bronze jar that stood by the fire-place for the reception of cigar-ends, tea dregs, and fruit-rinds. It was of fine Etruscan shape and gave its owner quite a sacrificial feeling when, in the throes of a clean-up, he bore it forth to be emptied of its contents; the act always reminded him of the funeral rites in a Sophoclean tragedy.

The omelet being ready, Aviolet tossed it with a superb air of mastery on to a dish. Then, dividing it into two portions he pushed the plate containing one towards Michael.

"Remember thy stomach," said he solemnly, "in the

days of thy youth and in thine age, when the uric acid threatens, it shall not fail thee."

The two men ate in silence, for the omelet was too good for divided attention. Then, reaching up to the sausages that hung in mottled redness from a nail over the mantelpiece, Aviolet seized the frying-pan and began to cook, dexterously sticking them with a fork as they sputtered with the heat. While thus busy, he sat well back in a low chair, with his legs a-straddle on the sharp-edged fender, that had apparently been used as a boot-scraper. The firelight gave lightning glimpses of his long, sallow face, with its bright eyes, dark-lashed like a child's, and wrinkled in deep, kindly folds. The hair was grizzled at the temples and the clean-shaven lips had an ironic upward curve. A plump and cosy cushion of flesh on his chin inclined towards the beak-like nose, but all was essentially cheerful—beak, cushion, and worn contours.

Leaf-brown and yellow were, he was wont to remark, his colours, and he dressed up to them in dead-leaf ties and shabby well-cut brown suits. For his clothes always smacked of the first-class tailor, though they certainly looked as if he went to bed in them. That was Louis Aviolet all over—contradiction incarnate; a man who tubbed like a Briton, yet refused to stay in houses where they used table centres; a man who wore a Bond Street suit and liked best to go barefoot; a *petit maître* half the way, yet with something of the vagabond in his temperament.

Such was Aviolet, the son of a Paris shopkeeper and an English nursery governess, who after being raised by a maiden aunt, had begun to tour the country at two-and-twenty as leading actor in old English comedy, mainly because he was a skilled fencer with a good leg. The bills of his part used to be decorated with masks and fencing foils clustered round a head, apparently of Medusa, but really that of a Muse, with the legend: "There is only one Shakespeare; there is only one Aviolet."

But that was years ago; he had left the stage suddenly, ostensibly because he made a hit with a novel, practically because, as *jeune premier*, he had to change his clothes so often.

Their feeding over, Aviolet puffed tobacco-smoke three times through his nose with slow appreciation, tilted his chair back and turned his face up towards the ceiling, on which he began, as he had begun hundreds of times before, to count the lines in the maze of cracks.

"Have you ever thought, Strode," said he, "of the bedrock problem of the time—how to deal with the emergent type—the quick, eager, big-fronted, grey-eyed children that are coming pouring in on us at every birth?"

Aviolet always plunged straight away into the centre of his own thoughts. Had you but just returned from the Russo-Japanese War, his opening sentence when he first met you would refer to the book he had just laid down, and not at all to your adventures.

"And every safeguard, everything that makes for ballast going—or gone," he continued.

"How d'you mean?"

"Religion dissolved in the juice of scientific irony—or just about, with every institution, from the divorce laws to hats in church, made a matter of discussion. Why, t'other day, Strode," he grinned, "a little girl, not eighteen, told me that a woman's hat in church was but a remnant of the Eastern Yashmak. I suggested it was a sort of vermiform appendix of the halo, but she thought that flippant."

"Out of the mouths of——"

"Then she began to discuss eugenics," interrupted Aviolet in his shrill, rapid tones, "though I bet, when her time comes, she won't run the risk and give us a child at all. No, she'll talk of it and tell others how it's done."

"Give me," said Strode, like a bumble-bee taking part in the Athanasian creed, "the rose-leaves and fancies of her grandmother—and her round dozen of children. She was a professional mother, although she didn't know it. As it is, it's all chaos, everybody running after everybody else's business, so that next to nothing gets done. How on earth would a train get driven if the stoker spent his time rushing round to see if the guard was asleep? That's what we're all doing now."

Aviolet laughed. He knew that the heterogeneous speculation of to-day, that jumps from psychic research to the principle of antitoxins, always annoyed Strode's tidy

mind; it was to him just a painful process that he called "splurging," for his brain was neither active enough to delight in mental gymnastics, nor light enough to find a verbal solution satisfying.

"Oh," said Aviolet with a shrug, "the truth is that what we're suffering from is just middle-class civilisation, the fussiest type ever known, for the middle class is the Paul Pry of all the classes, always pushing its nose into other people's skeleton cupboards and never knowing what's in its own. Paul Pry will never make a new world and that's what we want."

"A large order, surely."

"Nothing short of it's any good. For at present the two best classes simply deny life altogether, the prudent labourer won't allow his wife a child, lest it should come to the scrap-heap, and the rich won't have any because they're all fears. They fear life, fear death, fear pretty near all that comes between, too. No, it's a new religion and a new social order that we want."

"Send round the crier: Lost, stolen, or strayed—a religion and a new social order."

"They're coming," said Aviolet quietly. "They're even now at the doors. For the religion that's gone worshipped material prosperity. And material prosperity we've found —or some classes have—and it's but dust and ashes in the mouth. For though they fare sumptuously, they've simply forgotten how to live, and they're afraid to die. They live long, long lives, long, empty lives in the women and long feverish lives in the men. These want a new religion. And below those are the classes that have already put their hands on the material prosperity the others possess. And these want a new social order—and they have no fear of it, only a big hope that makes them trample down the weak in order to get it."

Michael drew a deep breath.

"That's what I've been wanting to have said for me to-night, I think," he said, looking down at his outstretched arms. "The new religion will, I suppose, come from above, from outside. It's the new social order I'm concerned with. Yet I've been acting blindly, feeling my way in the dark."

"As we all do—yet."

"Anyway, I've cut the painter," said Strode.

"What d'ye mean—cut the painter?"

"Broken with my uncle, who's cut off supplies, so that I can't go back to college. You've had a great deal to do with it, you know, Louis, for I never can bring any definiteness into my instinctive feelings. You've done that for me."

Aviolet whistled in dismay.

"That's the worst of a chap like me," he said explosively, "I blaze away, fire-works all over the place, but I never catch myself afire. The truth is, I like their middle-class money—what I can get of it. And though I curse them, 'tis but working off steam. I'd take their cheques right enough."

He sat silent, half-humorously, half-vexedly regarding his own discomfiture, for there is nothing more disconcerting to a major prophet than to find people suddenly sowing their seed according to his prophecies.

Strode laughed, as he leant back in his chair.

"I behaved pretty badly, I believe," he said, "but the whole thing got on my nerves to that degree. You know I've been staying with my uncle in Manchester, and one night I dined alone at his place. In came the butler to wait on me, in came two footmen behind him. One carried a brussels-sprout and t'other a potato, while the bishop—I mean the butler—blessed the ceremony. Each man held his dish like a parson dandling a chalice. 'Get away out of this,' said I at last, 'or come and sit down like Christians.' The butler motioned the others away and watched me to see if I was going to put a knife to my throat. Give me potato-pie in your shirt-sleeves after that! Inside, greenhouses and gardens and lies and gluttony and grudging service, and outside, men flung out of the works directly they 'speed up' a bit more, or a few less orders come in. And to the big house all the humbugs come crawling round for pickings—the lawnsleeves, the pill-box asses and the gownsmen. So I said: 'None of this for me.'"

"Ay, if a man can keep single, smoke shag, and read reprints, he can sit on a sunny bank and sleep pretty nearly all day," murmured Aviolet.

"I'm not made that way," said Strode shortly. "I want things, everything, just as they do below, where I'm going."

He jerked his thumb downwards in arena-fashion. "They want a bit of power, a bit of love, a bit of joy, a full stomach, and a full life. And so do I. And they fight for it. Both sides fight for it, for the damned common means of it. Why, do you know how many children come into life twisted, because the infernal doctor won't come without his guinea fee? That's the start in life for thousands, that's the light of day for 'em. God save King Mammon and your Paul Pry of the Middle Classes."

Aviolet listened with the sensations of a man who has opened a sluice gate.

"Yes, all very well, but I don't see how you come into it, after all. Granted it's all wrong, your coming out of your class won't alter anything. You'll only wreck yourself. Don't be a fool, Strode."

"There you go. That's your amateurish way. You rage against shams for years and when one begins to act, you——"

"I apologise. You're a spirit of another sort."

"Though I tell you frankly," said Michael getting up, "I can hardly say what's driving me. It wasn't altogether temper with a peppery old dyspeptic. It's instinct, mere instinct, I believe."

"And," said Aviolet, "after all, that's the one unanswerable reason. Argument you may fight, but instinct's like an octopus that grips you by a thousand arms."

"Anyhow," said Michael, "I'm built for work, physical work. Any fool with half an eye could see that. And I want to handle things, rough things."

"Engineering?"

"Closer grip than that. Not sitting at a desk working out stresses. I want to feel the stress."

"Samson?"

"If you like. Anyway, it's down there that I belong. I shall go first into Pym's forge and then to a foundry."

"Have you remembered Mrs. Strode? She's been cherishing big ideas about you and I shouldn't wonder if she's been seeing you playing a part up in the talky-talky shop at Westminster some day."

"There as a labour member, perhaps," laughed Strode.

"Well, you see, both Mrs. Strode and your sister must

naturally have been looking forward to having you at their back with the income of a professional man. Oh, cut it, Strode! Don't you see how madly Quixotic it all is?"

"My life's my own to do what I like with. I don't quite know where it's all going to end, but I intend to find out."

"Gad! you're a loud-crowing cockerel!"

"Besides, my mother will understand."

"I doubt it, and Cecily won't, at any rate."

"Oh, Cis!" said Michael carelessly, "Cis is a foolish little anachronism, Aviolet, who turns up her finicking little nose at everybody but parsons."

Aviolet turned hot and lit his pipe hurriedly, for he was at the stage when a man's heart leaps within him at the mere mention of a certain woman's name and to find her footprint anywhere is an experience as nerve-shaking as Crusoe's.

"Aviolet," laughed Strode, "where do you keep your butter?"

"In a specimen tin."

"And not in a pantry. Dirty, dirty, my son! And Cecily will require her husband to live up to a tall parlour-maid with streamers, while you, Louis, love to dine in your shirt-sleeves. Your love affairs, my poor friend, are at a worse pass than my business ones."

Aviolet was inclined to agree with this, as shortly afterwards, leaving Strode snoring on the bed, he turned out the lamp and went down for a stroll.

Speaking in a literary sense, Aviolet was the victim of his own purple patches. Once, and once only, he had achieved the prolonged flight of a carefully proportioned novel. But receiving no praise for its proportion and being lavishly commended for its occasional fine writing, he had sunk into a mere sketcher of silhouettes, a catcher of impressions, to whom constructive work seemed as banal as sign painting.

With regard to his love affairs, he was in still worse case, for Michael's sister Cecily was very far from being of old Rodin's opinion when he said: "Il n'y a pas de laideur." To Cecily an extraordinary number of human foibles were, in fact, ugly, as they are apt to be to those who have no sense either of the divine or the whimsical. And, unfortu-

nately for his suit, Aviolet was a seeker of the divine who was compact of whimsies.

Coming in to-night from his stroll, he felt inclined to kick Michael, who was still snoring, but thinking better of it, tilted the papers off a writing board and sat down to write a study of a kitchen tragedy, as point-device in its exactitude as an etching, as ironical as the tenderness of a Gallic wit—and perfectly unsaleable. It was the sort of work that set Cecily's teeth on edge, for she liked the feminine sentiment that idealises idiocy and is strenuously cheerful over cripples.

CHAPTER IV

A RABELAIS IN PETTICOATS

SMALL though it was, Snug Harbour admitted of vistas and as he stood on the threshold of it, with the morning sun hot on the wall outside and on the brass face of the grandfather clock inside, Michael could look to the right into the drawing-room whose windows faced the estuary and to the left down the entire length of the house whose rooms opened one into the other, with low, hasped windows looking out on the walled garden.

Sixty years before Michael's paternal grandfather, an old sea-captain, had bought the place, disembowelled it and rebuilt the interior in as cabin-like a fashion as possible. Now, fitted with furniture that had been in the Strode family for generations, it offered the freedom of its kindly geniality to all who were sufficiently sensitive to appreciate it. In the old linen chests there was the pleasant zeal of good housewives, in the feather beds the drowsiness of some Castle of Indolence, in the mirrors desire of woman and in the ticking of the grandfather clock the touch of doom that waits on desire and on rest alike.

Now Michael stood listening for his mother's footstep overhead, for, although breakfast was ready in the small room off the hall, she was nowhere to be seen downstairs. To summon her, Michael crossed to the drawing-room and began to strum *The Men of Harlech* with the loud pedal down.

Presently Mrs. Strode appeared in the doorway with the forward carriage of her face that always suggested intense listening. She was not yet forty-five, but her head was already piled up with a coronet of white hair and her skin had thickened with the sallowness of middle life. There was, however, no suggestion of age in the twinkling hazel eyes, nor in the big, thick-lipped mouth that could rattle out a Rabelaisian jest with all the zest of a three-bottle

hunting squire. She had, in fact, more affinity with those lusty ages that, if they acted before they thought, at any rate, contrived to live before they died, instead of, as is the present fashion, dying daily in the constant contemplation of their own feebleness.

"Michael," she exclaimed in clear, vibrant tones, "are you a bubble of the earth that you get here at this hour in the morning?"

"I slept on Aviolet's bed last night," he explained, coming across the room and swinging her right off the ground in the energy of his embrace.

It was his father's trick and Mrs. Strode's eyes were quick with memory as she felt his bear's grip. She was a very capable woman who, had she remained unmarried, would have turned into one of those efficient, but metallic, spinsters who have but the merest bowing acquaintance with nature. As it was, she had loved and suffered, fought with her back to the wall for somebody other than herself and often taken a beating. In the process she had learnt the something incalculable in human nature that baffles all attempts to bound it with a yard measure, or sound it with a plummet. Even now she always sat like a Buddha, well back on her chair, with hands firmly planted on her thighs, save at such times when she was handling a needle or a rolling pin, or squeezing chords out of the piano: the attitude expressed her forcefulness. To Mrs. Strode all vagueness, legal, medical, or practical, in a novel or elsewhere, was positive pain and to hear her say: "This must be seen to," would have fired the zeal of the most typical Cabinet Minister that ever "had the matter under consideration"—postponed *sine die*.

"Come, then," she said, leading the way to the breakfast room. "Cis is away at early service and has her meal afterwards with the vicar, so we shall be alone."

"The vicar? Has Cis taken to free love, then?"

"Oh, the new man is quite safe. He has a wife and five children," said Mrs. Strode, stooping to fill the teapot. "He preaches blood, not works, or faith. Never mind your life, says he, you must have blood, blood, the cleansing blood. He really makes me feel so anaemic."

"Queer that Cis should be your daughter," laughed

Michael. "It must be the strangest thing to look at your children and wonder how they'll turn out. Just like opening a series of lucky bags, I should think."

"The contents of lucky bags, Michael," said Mrs. Strode drily, "don't offer a wide range of surprises. But really you are rather like an Esau this morning. Didn't you have time for a shave?"

"Sorry, mater," answered he, passing a hand over an unshaven chin, "I'll put that right after breakfast."

"But," continued she reminiscently, "I was rather subject to nightmares, I must confess, when I found myself alone with a boy to rear. Every now and then, I'd have a fever fit that I shouldn't be able to do it—especially in the early morning. Then, when the daylight looked in, I'd recover."

Left a widow fifteen years ago with two baby children, a minute income and a house of her own, Mrs. Strode had spent her life in cheese-paring. Even now she was not miserly, but saving had so long been a habit that she enjoyed it rather than otherwise, and economy as practised by a woman by no means assumes the shape of mean vice that it so often does in a man. She could still remember the day when it was a question of a charwoman to scrub versus a subscription at Mudie's. In the end she had banned the woman of pail and soap and chosen the books. As it was, Snug Harbour's dressing-tables and washstands were humble muslin-draped mounds, but in it there was a grand piano that was kept well tuned and two London papers daily appeared on the doormat.

Yet its mistress was often hungry; it was the quality she shared with her generation. By turns she craved for a salon, a reputation as an author, and a friendship with a maker of history. The first craving she satisfied by tea-parties, the second by writing letters to the local paper and the third—? Well, for the third, she relied on her son. The only thing she never wanted now was a lover, which was just as well, seeing that genteel Upham, like Granford, is given over to the Amazons.

"But," said Mrs. Strode placidly, "you know it was really the other way about. To rear a big, straightforward thing like you was child's play to my present task."

"What's that?"

"To lure Cecily from the narrow path for the sake of her soul's health. Oh, Michael," she burst out, "you don't know what a comfort it is to me to have you back."

"Good old mater!"

"To have somebody besides Louis, who doesn't take everything *au pied de la lettre*. For goodness' sake, boy, don't marry a woman who will send for the plumber when you talk of safety valves."

"I won't. I assure you I'll be most careful on that point."

The mellow sound of Michael's big, tolerant laugh rang through the low rooms to his mother's infinite content. She liked roomy things, from shoes up to sons, and Cecily's tiny stature and intense propriety had the unfortunate effect of calling out all her mother's impishness. Yet the girl was never far from her mother's thoughts and even at this moment Mrs. Strode was beginning to trim a green Liberty hat for Cecily—with a scarf, for daisies were too garishly artificial and feathers too inhumane for Miss Perfection.

"Mother," said Michael as he watched her, "do you never see anything under a veil? Never allow yourself one bit of an illusion? Not even about Cis or me?"

"I never once called you Mike in all my life," she answered mischievously. "You've been big Michael of the archangelic build ever since I short-coated you."

"Do you make plans for us?"

"Mothers are always given to crystal-gazing for their children. Sometimes they refuse to believe in the cloud shapes they see and then they swear they'll never look again. But they don't keep their oath, you know."

Michael frowned to himself as he realised the blow he was going to deal her. He had the gift, far oftener found in slow men than in quick-witted ones, of realising an outlook entirely different from his own. To Mrs. Strode his present decision to refuse a professional career and abruptly to break off from the traditions of his family would look like the thing she most despised, the thing she had most strenuously taught him to avoid, that *impuissance de vivre* which avoids the restraints of a definite career from sheer slackness.

And slackness she would excuse in nobody but a philosopher, a thing that she was very sure Michael was not.

"But what's the matter with Cis?" he asked, in order to give a happier turn both to the conversation and to his own thoughts, "that she needs a mother's corruption? Isn't Louis as devoted as ever?"

"Louis is a jewel."

"What is it, then? Have you been trying to stop the manufacture of church millinery?"

He lifted the linen sheet that covered an embroidery frame in the corner of the room.

"Humph!" grunted he, inspecting the delicate blue and gold of a half finished design for an altar-cloth. Cecily was a professional maker of church embroidery and Mrs. Strode often smiled, for she had a strong spice of Voltaire in her composition, at the queer atmosphere of materialist speculation in which these particular wares were manufactured.

"No," said Mrs. Strode, compressing her lips rather bitterly, "I have more sense than to interfere with that. In the first place, Cecily is by way of being an artist and the things are beautiful in themselves, whatever we may think of the purpose for which they are intended. Also, it brings in about fifty pounds a year, which the butcher and baker appreciate."

"Also, mother," said Michael disapprovingly, "though early communion and church millinery may suit neither you nor me, Cis is another sort altogether, and I suppose she gets some good out of them. You're hard on Cis, mother."

"I am. It comes of living alone with her. I make her afraid of me, I believe."

"Mother!"

"I do. You know," she continued, screwing up her eyes as she always did when she wanted to put a subtle point, "how irritating it is to talk to a person who seems, intellectually, to have lived on a desert island, how every now and then you're brought up with a sudden jolt that rattles every tooth in your head."

"Somebody who never heard of Rudyard Kipling and doesn't know who Henry James is," said Michael, proudly showing his own capacity for following up a trail.

"That sort. Well, it's difficult to put it clearly, but Cecily's like that about all that life means. For all she's so good, she's nothing but a moral idiot, because she insists on looking on human nature as though it were fit for the Courts of Heaven straight away."

"And Aviolet wants to marry her," laughed Michael, "Aviolet, who cut his wisdom teeth among the ladies of the profession! But, after all, that's perfectly natural. To Louis, Cis is just a little white maiden, heavenly sweet in her ignorance of evil. Don't bother, mater. She'll learn. Life deposits smuts fast enough."

"That's just it. I don't want the smut deposit on my Cecily. I want to prepare a surface on which no smut can lodge. I want her to awake to life in a wide room, not in some ugly hole. In trying to take Cecily out of the little walled garden in which she has entrenched herself——"

"With your connivance, mater, up till now."

"Just so, I grant it, with my connivance. In trying to get her out, I'm looking at the thing from the widest possible standpoint."

"It wouldn't be you if you didn't," laughed Michael. "Why, to you everything is big. You swim into a room like a man-o'-war into a harbour, and you foot a stocking with an eye to the cosmic effects of foot-gear. Why, didn't you bring me up on the *Origin of Species*, and the *Heritage of the Kurts?* I believe you never gave us roly-poly without thinking of the ethical values of jam."

"Michael, Michael, what prigs I should have turned out, if that were true."

"Well," said he seriously with an inward, brooding look, "I think you've made me not quite able to take things simply. I feel bound, you know, to 'look before and after,' if not 'to pine for what is not.'"

"Michael, I'm not afraid for you. Whatever you do, you're of the quick, not the dead. And I'm not sure of that about Cecily. Oh, look at them, all the Dresden china shepherdesses of women, who keep their little souls and bodies so clean that they never sense one single reality from their christening robe to their shroud. I won't, I won't, have Cecily like that. I'd rather see her kicked round the room by her husband than that."

"Awfully bad effect on the husband, that, you know," said Michael.

"What is it that makes anybody's life worth living?" demanded Mrs. Strode, looking like—if the thing be conceivable—an animated Buddha.

"To know his bit of work's sound," growled Michael.

"Yes, for a man. But for a woman it's something much deeper. She builds in lives, Michael, not bricks or stone, or even flesh. For to her is entrusted the soul of a man's being. He may wander, but he'll come back to her, if she's his really. On her heart she bears his all, his children, his work, his meaning in the big scale of things. Not even death can undo that. No, I don't believe it can. You remember that poor soul whose husband was unfaithful and who took him back again and again. 'Bad example,' said all we Pharisees. But all she would say—sullenly, doggedly—was, 'he is my man.' That's the Alpha and the Omega. He was her man. Just as God might say: 'That's my world, where I work my will.'"

"You want Cis to be like that?"

Mrs. Strode nodded.

"Then, you're a woman of faith and no mistake," shrugged Michael. "Why, she'd think it blasphemy to love a man who couldn't say the creed, no—all the creeds."

"You're wrong there. At first, she used to take Louis to church, till he told her at last that he couldn't possibly believe in an anthropomorphic god and could only see a series of forces in the world, whose origin might conceivably be one. Cecily looked out the meaning of anthropomorphic in the dictionary, but the next evening she did her hair in pompadour waves because she knew that he—Louis, that is—was coming."

"Mother, you really are a horror to botanise and geologise on Cis's poor little ways, the ways of a maid in love. In the words of old Bunyan, 'you have no bowels.' But Aviolet will make her a kind husband."

"But what will Aviolet's life be like with a moral iceberg sitting round? For Aviolet's very human, Michael. I sometimes think that there are people who appear to carry about with them vestiges of every stage they've passed through, instead of dropping them as most of us do. Aviolet

can be ape, man, angel. And Cecily is a prim little prunes and prism. My dear boy, do rouse yourself and face the situation."

"Well, find somebody else for her, a curate or something."

"You really are most thoughtless, Michael, to talk like that, when fate has blown such a delightful man to a quiet little country village, just on purpose for Cecily! Besides, don't you see that my reputation is at stake?"

"What, for being the kindest, most eccentric of mothers?"

"For doing my bit of work properly, a thing about which women are just as anxiously concerned as men, Michael. I often think when I read the books of the good people who are always writing on the selfishness of folks with greenhouses in the country and flats in town, of the little bits of lives that are lived, all up and down the land, just as efficiently, as capably as they can possibly be. I want to turn out Cecily from my hand, a real human wife with a heart in her, not a spectre, a spook, who spends her days whitewashing herself. But she was always the same—a tiny spot on her frock, a little dust on her hair, and 'twas 'Out, damnèd spot,' till I dropped her in the wash-tub. And now she's like that about people's peccadilloes and creeds and ways. I believe Cecily would just enjoy being made love to by a waxen image, warranted not to move unless its joints were worked."

"Little bits of life lived just as efficiently as they can be," said Michael softly to himself. "Mother, if I'm in any way a disappointment to you, will you be large-minded enough to see that—that a man must follow his own bent, that he must start from his own standpoint, not from that of his class, or his rank? Will you, mother?"

"What do you mean, Michael?"

"I want to face actual life and I can't do it in the sentimental middle class. They see everything through a haze of sham idealism."

From walking up and down he stood still for a moment before a large map of England that hung on the wall. Then, aggressively planting a square thumb on the centre, he said, "And another thing I want to do is to put one little spot on this straight before I die. I want to clear up one point in

the hugger-mugger of the industrial muddle. I reckon, too, it'll about take my time to do it."

"Well," said Mrs. Strode, drawing a long breath, "I rather fancy you're a big thing and I think I can trust you —if it's only to make mistakes in all good faith."

"Mother, what a comfort you are to me! But here's Cecily."

They watched her from the window as she stooped over a bunch of primroses, touching them delicately to lift their bedraggled heads out of the mud.

"How can a woman find it in her to be hard on Cecily?" said Michael.

Mrs. Strode smiled to herself, for she knew that a woman's wits are never quicker than when she watches a girl.

"What a man thinks of a woman," said she, "is only a test of his instincts, not of his brain, nor his heart. It's different with us."

"Then the man must be more often right than the woman," said Michael stoutly.

Both of them rejoiced in discussions: Aviolet often said that Mrs. Strode and Michael could hardly let the sun set without wondering what his motive might be in doing so.

It was rather on a point of professional dignity, perhaps, that Cecily irritated her mother. For, sea-worthy craft as she was, Mrs. Strode was a vessel entering port with bunting flying, whilst little Cecily was merely signalling for a pilot, in great dread of the hidden eddies, the shifting sands of an unknown shore.

Michael watched his sister with the smile one sees on a big man's face at the gay sportiveness of a little animal. On the tip of Cecily's upturned nose there was a tiny sun-spot, freckle it were too harsh to call it. It was, in fact, the only concession to human weakness in the small square face, set so true on frail neck and sloping shoulders. Wide black lashes shaded grey eyes that drooped, delicately pensive, under the dark shadowing; it was a lady of the spinet and tambour period who walked up the path with pink thumb cocked up over the train of her gown. Her favourite text was: "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength," and she was always as calmly industrious as a beaver.

Every time Louis Aviolet looked at her, he said: "A man likes to have something to take care of"; yet for calm audacity Cecily could have given the skipper of a Mississippi steamer points and beaten him after all. For it would have cost her no effort gaily to point out the narrow way to a grey-haired philosopher, had she known one, or cheerfully to embark on an argument with a Crown lawyer, cutting through his casuistry, with her sharp little knife of nonsense. And neither would have been half as angry with her as Mrs. Strode was every day.

With the spring dancing up the river reaches and sporting across the blue hills of Haldon like a drunken piper, Mrs. Strode sat, a few hours later, reading a letter from her brother which ran thus:

"My Dear Cecilia:—

"I do not know whether the news I have for you will be a surprise or not. In any case I consider that you have yourself mainly to thank for what has occurred. I say mainly, because, as I told him last night, I consider your son to be a throwback, ancestrally speaking. But even though we grant that factor in the case, it was only to be expected that aberrations of conduct would show themselves in a boy brought up in an atmosphere of constant discussion of root-principles, an atmosphere in which the obvious foundations of law and order become a mere matter of conjecture—such an atmosphere, in fact, my dear Cecilia, as I regret to say, he found in your house."

Mrs. Strode's nose began to quiver angrily.

"What a fool you can make yourself, Billy," she observed wrathfully. "But what on earth is it all about?"

"Your son," the letter continued, "has elected to give up his proposed professional career because, if I understand him rightly, he considers that (*a*) capitalist money is accursed, and (*b*) the career of a professional man is licensed humbug. I understand he wishes to become a working man, in the ridiculous phrase of the time.

"Of course, youth is subject to eruptions; in my time, it used to take the form of the seduction of servant girls, in ours, it breaks out as ragging—in men of gentlemanly

breeding, at least. Michael being differently constituted has chosen to sow quite different wild oats. When he has recovered from his folly, you will find him anxious to make his fortune in the orthodox way. Should such be the case, you may communicate with me. He can then come into my office as a clerk.

"I consider that I am dealing with him in a spirit of the greatest magnanimity and I do so because I recognize a certain grit in the lad. He may be a fool, but he isn't a knock-kneed fool, at any rate.

"I should, however, make it quite clear that under no circumstances will I advance any capital for the starting of wild-cat schemes.

"I remain, my dear Cecilia,

"Your affectionate brother,

"WILLIAM J. COSTELOW."

Mrs. Strode sat staring at the river, vaguely following the course of an outward bound coaler. Though mentally the contents of the letter seemed to have reached her, they were emotionally bleached of all meaning and she repeated the phrases of it with the zealous fervour of a fanatic working off a creed.

At last she saw Louis Aviolet passing the house and hurrying out, she stopped him and put the letter in his hand.

"What does it mean?" she asked, walking by his side up the Strand. "I really can't take it in at all. I suppose he told you—Michael, I mean—something about this last night?"

The broken phrase warned Louis to be careful. Yet, after all, plain dealing was the kindest course.

"Yes," he said quietly, "he wishes to enter a foundry as a hand."

"Why?"

"That," said Louis, drawing a deep breath, "is to ask me to explain Michael. And you know him better than I do."

"I've never known him," she said bitterly, "never. If I had this wouldn't surprise me. Do you think he really means it?"

"Did Michael ever plan a thing and not mean it?" he shrugged.

"Well, I thought I knew the saddest thing that can happen to a woman. But I was quite wrong; I didn't know it. I thought the worst was to see that you've lost your glamour for the man who loves you, that you aren't the centre of things to him any more, as you once were. Well, that's bad, but I see it's worse to know that you've always been a stranger to your child, whom you thought you knew inside out. For it isn't that Michael's grown away from me. He never was mine, or this wouldn't have been the shock to me that it is. I should have looked for it. But I never did."

"In one sense none of us has ever known Michael, dear lady. I doubt whether many of us ever will."

"My brother says it's my fault, that he has heard everything too freely discussed."

"*Mea culpa*, also," laughed Louis. "*There* I beat my breast, too."

"Oh, if only we could have foreseen," sighed Mrs. Strode, caught up in an eddy of her own misgivings and tumultuously responsive to it. "Of course one knows that there is unemployment, strikes, misery, hatred of every sort——"

"And we all say 'something must be done,' and instead of doing it, fall to a great jabbering like the monkeys in the forest when there's a block in the jungle. Only—you know Michael doesn't talk. He never will, much."

"But what possible good can he do by leaving his own class? It's ridiculous, childish."

"Look here, dear lady, let's get to grips of the thing. Here's a lad who would have been a soldier in a time when war was the breath of the world. Well, instead of being born when the Ironies blew Napoleon across Europe, he's born when, behind all the khaki and the naval scares, there's something quite different being discussed, and not only discussed, but lived, breathed, eaten, drunk, till you can't escape from it, even in the uttermost parts of the earth."

"You mean Socialism."

"Call it what you like—Socialism, Democracy, Problems of Poverty. It's the world spirit and it's got Michael, just as any other world spirit would have got him. He's a great cavern through which the winds of the age may blow.

You must stand aside. So must I, so must we all. Michael will gang his own gait, whether we will or no."

"I have been in labour and brought forth a whirlwind, then."

"Yes, if there is such a thing as a quiet, peaceable, dour, steady whirlwind, you have."

"But what panacea has he?"

"That's why I believe—faintly—in him," said Louis, with bent brows. "Everyone has panaceas, but no one is prepared to go down into the pit of labour, to see what it's like down there, before they prescribe."

"You might as well tell me the physician ought to inject into his veins the same poison his patient is suffering from."

"So he ought, or into someone else's veins by way of experiment."

"It's so extraordinary and so disappointing. I like being up in the world, and we've always been so very down, so very humble, and now, we'll be lower still."

Aviolet laughed, with a perception that a corner had been turned.

"Well," he said, "you've all your life admired people who do weird things. Now, you've got one in your own family, you really mustn't complain."

"Oh, I'm like the rest of us. For we all live by proxy nowadays. I've talked about doing original things, but I never dared to walk down the street barefoot. We read *Modern Utopias*, but never do anything more to forward them than take an old woman a piece of pudding. All *my* thinking has been of the general principle order. It's been with me as with others—God bless the squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations. Utopias and Socialism have only been conversational Aunt Sallies.'

"Same here, dear lady."

They both paused to laugh.

"Have you ever thought," said Louis thoughtfully, chipping off the head of a thistle, "how queerly Michael grasps the real and never sees the actual? He lives, so to speak, behind the scenes; he sees the deeper things, the strife, the hunger, the fight, yet of social advantages, of the shibboleths of class, he is as ignorant as a babe. He's like

a novelist who hears his people's hearts beat against the cosmic spaces, but never sees them cross a room."

"God bless him," said Mrs. Strode softly.

"Yes, just so," remarked Aviolet, abstractedly following his own line of thought, "but all the same, he's densely ignorant of the fact that he has any reality inside him at all. He sees himself as a brain, a purpose, a will, and all the time, there are hidden things that will start out at him—from within himself, as they do from within us all. And he'll be more helpless then than most of us are. Michael," he continued gravely, "has, I believe, never kissed a girl yet. I wish he had."

Mrs. Strode looked at him for a moment and Aviolet understood that she shied from the subject. He was quick to take such hints and proceeded calmly:

"Do you know what prayer he ought to pray daily?"

"No."

"'Give me wings of great desire,
Lest I look within and fail.'

How will he stand the looking inside himself, the vision of all the enigmas, the passions, fears, and desires within, Michael, who thinks to act and fight is as easy as to walk along a turnpike road?"

"He'll come home looking like a sweep every day, I suppose," wailed Mrs. Strode, returning to lower levels, "and all the white doors will have black finger-marks on them, and oh! how the place will talk."

She was beginning to enjoy the prospect immensely, for she felt that the curtain was going up on an uncommonly vital piece of drama. "Any way," she fluted triumphantly, "I'm the mother of a man-child. You know a woman always feels like that when her boy takes a violent initiative. 'Tisn't a woman's gift at all, that."

"Woman seems to have exhausted her power of initiative once and for all by the apple-eating episode," said Aviolet reflectively. "But that was, of course, rather an important one."

Mrs. Strode laughed; epigram as a safety-valve remains the discovery of our highly self-conscious age.

"How is it with you and Cecily?" she asked. "You

know, though I'd love to give her to you, I often feel that it's a mistake, that she is too small to satisfy you."

"If I were insincere, I should say 'too perfect,'" said Louis sadly. "But do you know how I feel about the rougher, coarser side of me? That I've got it just that I may be a wall of defence to Cecily, that she may sun herself in peace against me. And for small, why, to me she's just a part of That Unknown whose dwelling is very much bigger than the light of setting suns."

"All that? Poor little girl," mocked Mrs. Strode half contemptuously.

"Don't," said Louis, "don't. Think of how much Michael means to you and then you won't laugh, dear lady, at me. For when should a lover be lyrical, if it's not when he's in love? As for me, I just thank God, not in the old egotistical man's way that He made Cecily for me, but that He made me for Cecily."

"You really are rather a nice man, Louis, and oh! how much more charming are the young men of to-day than those of yesterday. But what may have happened to that beef-steak pudding at home, I tremble to think!"

Left alone on the river-walk, Louis sat down on the bench that looks out over the reedy bed of Exe. The murmur of the wind through the hedge at the back of him thrilled along his blood like a harp whose strings are struck by the cunning finger of Nature. Every grass blade in the path that quivered in the calm sweep of the wind, every tree that hummed at its masterful onslaught, seemed thrilling with a mighty current of life that bathed the visible universe in a stream of happy consciousness that was restful, yet life-giving, eternal and yet full of the day's joy. Fold over fold of cloud lay like a mighty hand over the valley, bathing the far horizon in a haze of mist that gleamed like an opal sea between the distant tree-branches, till the vision of the future faded before the watcher's eyes in the deep-garnered, ancestral memories of the past, and both alike were lost in the bliss of the present.

For our deepest experiences are homely ones and the lover's joy, like the fighter's triumph, has that smack of the eternal about it that gives the last hallowing touch to all our realities. We are, indeed, instinctively at home with

big things; we may quail before the haughty doormat of a prince or a *nouveau riche*, but birth and death and love and sacrifice are old friends of ours. They are part of the deep primaeval things, whether we count these to start with the slime-bred creatures of the primitive ocean, or further back still, on the creative anvil of a God.

CHAPTER V

THE SILENT WOMAN

JOHN PYM set down the two buckets of water he had brought from the stand-pipe at the bottom of the street and pausing at the door of his cottage, solemnly suffered the smell of frying bacon to insinuate its savour into the cavernous recesses of his broad nostrils. He gazed at the black-leaded scraper in the wall, and at the well whitened door-step, for his house was a childless one and well redd-up. At last he stepped across the step, not on it, and carried his pails down to the back premises, whence came presently the noise of vigorous sluicing.

When he appeared in the living-room, his face shining, sleek and soapy within its rim of smut, there was no need of a craftsman's sign to denote his trade, for the blackness of the unwashed parts of him, the peculiar dingy tan of his skin, marked him 'smith' as plainly as though he carried the tokens of the hammer and anvil. Dropping into the patch-work-covered chair by the stove, he began to light his pipe. As he had spent his days chiefly in draughty places, he always curved his hand round the bowl of the pipe. His was the face of a pursy old terrier, grey about the bearded jowl, with black-fringed hazel eyes and darkish locks brushed upwards on each side of his forehead, like the prick-ears of the beast he resembled.

"Well, Martha," said he. His lips curled outwards when he spoke, like the rim of a beaker.

"Well, John," answered his wife, splitting open an egg-shell with her thumb nail and dropping the yoke into the pan. The pink of her maiden cheeks had long ago run into a uniform redness and her face, in its frame of white hair, flashed like the sudden glow of winter sunlight over frost. She was a comely woman always, in spite of the yellow teeth in receding gums which she showed so sincerely.

"Rum start of young Strode's, ain't it, Martha?" said he, puffing hard at his pipe. "What do 'ee make of it?"

"Maggots," said Mrs. Pym, curtly.

"Meaning by maggots?"

"Idees," answered she, raising her voice as though addressing a deaf man. "Young men that's up in the world be like high-bred dogs, mighty hard to rear. And how hard *they* be, you ought to know, what with bitches that eat their pups and the distemper that picks off what isn't eaten."

John Pym waited. He had waited all his life for Martha's metaphors and he knew they were like her bakings—bound to come right in the long run.

"With lads 'tis either moonshine, or maggots, or maidens. If they leave the maidens alone, like Michael, they'm after notions, and if 'tisn't notions, 'tis moonshine."

"I can't call to mind that ever I had either," said John meditatively.

"And who was it that went off at sixteen and shipped as boy before the mast?"

"Why so I did, that's a fac', Martha. But I felt I must let out, or bust."

"And what do 'ee call that but moonshine?" said Mrs. Pym, tilting down the steaming kettle to pour water into the teapot. She had something of the jockey's wrist, with its peculiar twisting power. "'Twasn't maggots with you," she continued, "for I don't believe you ever had two idees to rub together in your head. And as for maidens——"

"Well, Martha?" Generously and defiantly.

"The least said, the soonest mended, I reckon," said Martha. She had suffered many things at the hands of her husband, who was by no means faithful to her, but that "well, John," of hers had never failed him yet, and never would, maidens or no maidens.

For it isn't at all the fact that a woman would rather die than face the truth; she is always facing it, but she would rather die than confess it, which is an entirely different matter.

Pym grunted, as he drew his chair up to the table. He guessed that his wife was more perturbed than she would confess and the next moment he knew it, for Martha, turning suddenly on him, exclaimed:

"Go out and wash your ears, John Pym. You look like a horniegollick."

He recognised that things were very bad with his wife, for there were three gradations in her geniality: John Pym, Arctic; Pym, Temperate; Johnny, Tropic. He scuttled from the room for more extensive sluicing.

Yet, at bottom, Mrs. Pym's sharpness was due rather to that keen zest which sweeps through a psychologist when he encounters a baffling human problem than to mere ill-temper. She felt now like a cross-examining barrister trying to tackle a slippery Irish witness, for up till to-day she had fancied that everybody in Upham was an open book to her. And now Michael Strode puzzled her.

Once more at table, with egg streaking his beard, John began in a grumbling monotone:

"Three times a year regular, we've a-seen his box going off and coming back *as* regular. And we looked for it to come and go, same as ever. Then he comes into my forge and says: 'Pym,' or 'John Pym,' as the case mid be, 'I'm not going up the country any more. I'm coming to work in your forge, if so be you'll have me.' And his mother lets 'en. That's what beats me. And you say 'maggots' when I ask what it means. And it don't seem neither here nor there, none of it don't."

"Oh, maybe he'll grow out of it."

"Now, there's where you're out, my dear. He's not one of the sort that shifts like a weathercock. He blows like a trade wind. Sot he is, if ever a lad was sot. And when he says: 'I'll be a smith,' it's smith he means and not lawyer, nor doctor, nor veterinary, no, nor yet parson."

His voice rose to a shout, while Mrs. Pym, taking back her own words, nodded in agreement over the cup of black, heavily sweetened tea that she held propped up in front of her, with her fat elbows planted solidly on the table whose legs were scored and thinned by the efforts of many generations of claw-sharpening cats.

Old Rough and Tough, as the villagers called her, being a childless woman with an insatiable appetite for human affairs, had adopted Upham and neighbourhood as her field of observation. She knew the place and its people, as she was wont to say, like the back of her hand. From the ward-

robes of her neighbours to the most deeply cherished secrets of their hearts, there was nothing that escaped Mrs. Pym's observant eye and recording heart. No one could turn a dress or cast sheep's eyes at a bachelor-man without her knowing it and long before the school of novelists arose whose pride is *constater*, to register, she had been at their work. Only, in her case, the record of her discoveries will, in the fulness of time, moulder beneath the churchyard sod, instead of on the publishers' remainder shelves.

Nor did her interest in her neighbours leave her, as it sometimes leaves the novelist, a mere Paul Pry. For she was the village mainstay and with a bad case on his hands, the doctor would always say, "I must have Martha Pym," till the formula came to be regarded as "Relations sent for." If a man were injured, it was Mrs. Pym who helped to put the broken body together and afterwards comforted his wife on her broad pin-stuck bosom.

During the meal she was very silent, for, as she often remarked: "When a woman knows her work, her doesn't say much. But when a man knows his, he chitters all day about it. That's the main difference between 'em." And in her world there was not much which she had not mastered; she could catch the folly peering out of a maiden's eye, or the knavery from a man's; she could draw very close to that narrow knife-edge which spans the gulf between life and death. Hence she talked little.

At last she rose from the table and walked to the window, while across the twisted knots of the cactus she watched the flying scud rolling inland from the sea. The neighbours' lamps flung yellow patches across the road, lights swung from the mast-heads of the anchored vessels and the sound of a carpenter's hammer came from the disused sail-maker's yard opposite Snug Harbour. Like a general surveying the topography of an enemy's country, Mrs. Pym watched the town. It was as if the roofs of the houses were off for her, and she, an angel on two sticks, could peer into the cauldrons within. At last, with a jerk, she pulled down the blind, though there was no need to do so, since the houses between Monmouth Street and the Strand are built on the steep slope of the hill and the Pyms' window that overlooked the river was high above the Strand itself.

"There's Mrs. Strode," she thought, while she twirled a rag over the plates in the wash-up bowl, "a good manager, who never buys eggs till March, leaves lamb alone till 'tis mutton, and has a dummy to make the dresses on. The house is their own and Mrs. Strode's brother pays for the college. It can't be money, then, unless they've had losses somehow, though by what I hear tell, the brother's rolling. It'll just be maggots, I reckon."

"Where do 'em come from, then, Martha?" asked Pym, for the last sentence was spoken aloud.

This was a true harping of her doubts, for there were no such things as spontaneous maggots in her philosophy and of the eternal maggot-breeding by means of books that goes on now she had no knowledge.

"It's that Aviolet," she cried at length, "he's as thick as thieves with 'en and Aviolet's enough to make a passon say his prayers backward. Rie-bald, I call 'en."

"Lord, Martha," grumbled Pym, who found prolonged cogitation harassing, "the lad's just a pup that wants something to chaw upon. So he tries an anvil. There he is, I believe," he whispered, rising to open the door. "Good evening, sir," he said, sheepishly conscious of having been caught talking about the visitor. "Seasonable weather for the time of year. Soon bring on Whitsun, these here fine bright days."

As long as Michael could remember, Pym had told him that frost would "soon bring on Christmas." Pym would have resisted the Daylight Saving Bill and have fought in the *Give us our Eleven Days* riots, for time and its subdivisions were to him no man-made conventions.

Strode laughed. When he laughed even slightly he nearly closed his eyes and when he gloried in the jest, he shrugged his shoulders up to his ears and kicked his legs.

"Well, Pym," said he, "have you consulted the missus and is she going to let me have a job?"

"We can't make it out, sir, and that's the truth. You see, if you was a sort of spring-heel jack, here to-day and gone to-morrow, 'twouldn't cast on our beam ends, same as this has. But Master Michael's as steady as time, says Martha to me."

His memories were a little vague, but his sentiments were just.

"And there's another thing that, sim to me, you haven't thought on, when you says, 'Here I'm going to be a working man and turn my back on what I'd got afore me to do.' It's this—that you'll be taking the place o' some chap as wants the work and your place, where you ought to be a-working, will be empty. I can't put my meaning proper, but that's about the size of it."

Martha eyed her husband in amazement to hear him talking so much sense.

"You put the matter admirably, Pym. I've thought of that, too. But, if you give me a job, is there any actual man whose place I shall be taking?"

"Can't say there is. But there might be. I've got a good few jobs in hand, yacht ballasting and that, and could do with another hand for the time, 'tis true."

"Then let it stand at that," said Michael, stretching his long legs towards the fire and thrusting his hands deep in his trousers pockets till he looked almost hunch-backed. "I'm wrong. I've got wrong and I've set myself to get right—somehow. You see, Pym, it's like this. If you want to unlock a door, you may oil a bit there and ease a bit here, but it's no good without the master-key. I don't know what that is yet, but I'm looking for it. And I'm not sure 'tisn't down somewhere in your forge. Anyway, I'm going there to see if I can't find it."

"'Tis easy found," said John, who was wont to remark how wonderful 'twas what things come out, 'when a man gets talking like.' "See what you've got to do and do it. And don't jaw about it. Jaw's worse than drink and worse than bone-laziness. The very minute a man begins to jaw about his work, he's done for. The worst sort of skipper you can sail under is your chitterer. There's no breed about 'en."

Michael threw back his head and roared with laughter, for Uncle Pym would have talked the hind legs off a donkey, had the feat been possible.

"They'm always Methodies, too—chitterers all, my lord. But, after all, the chittering skipper's rare. Mostly in that trade they'm men that know their work and can carry

on to the last inch of canvas. 'Tis in other trades, where a man can make believe he *is* a man by chittering, that you meet the windbagging humbugs."

"That's why I want to cut it, Uncle Pym. You've hit the nail. I've had enough of 'em, the talky-talkies. There's the teacher who couldn't keep an account-book straight teaching mathematics and the parson preaching salvation, when he knows no more about how the world's to be saved than other men, and the magistrate who never drank muck in a tied house fining a drunk and disorderly. Every profession's all talk. I'll have a trade and get quit of it. I want to handle things and know what I'm about. Damned rot, so much talk."

"And," said Mrs. Pym, in acidulated comment, "while you men be a-talking here, I've turned the heel of a sock and mended the seat of John's trousies."

But they paid no more heed than do the actors in a tragedy to the wails of the chorus.

"So 'tis," nodded Pym, "that's what I said. You want to get your wisdom teeth cut. So did I. Boy before the mast on a wind-jammer, smuggling brandy off the Brazil coast for five years. On a collier first; knocked the nonsense out and the sense in. And I learnt to know a man when I see 'en. And when a chap's learnt that, he's got the hang of things."

He smacked his chest appreciatively and said masterfully: "Martha, isn't there a drop of beer in the house?"

Mrs. Pym knitted placidly and John subsided. Strode paid no attention to the interlude.

"That's so," he said, rising restlessly and leaning against the chimney-piece. "I've learnt to know a humbug, now I want to know a man."

"And don't you trust the man," said Pym, "who says his treasure's in heaven and then comes in and fights every item in a bill."

"I won't," said Michael, "and I don't like the man that's always talking about his investments. Why, there's my uncle. He told me that he hoped I'd turn out a good investment. Told me, in fact, how much he'd laid out in Michael Strode Shares."

"Well," said Pym sturdily, "a fac's a fac'. And I don't

think no worse of him for saying it out. What's the good of blinkers? Women's trade, they be."

"And women don't set such stock in them as you think by, John Pym," said Martha.

"Come down to-morrow then, six-thirty sharp," cut in Pym. "I'm master in my own shop, I reckon," he continued, glancing aggressively towards his wife.

"Right," answered Strode, with a deep pull at his pipe.

"A Primitive Methody, no, nor a Bible Christian, couldn't have done more mischief than what you have this night, John Pym," said Martha firmly, when Michael was gone.

It was fully three days before she addressed him again as "Johnny" and by that time Michael had got over the first difficulty of a 'prentice-hand at forge work, the instinct to seize with the bare hand, for the practised smith uses, not his fingers, but a vice, for grasping purposes and might almost be said to touch nothing save through the medium of something else.

A few days later a long bar of sunlight lay straight across the cliff that formed the back wall of the forge, bringing out the red grain of the blackened sandstone and gleaming on the iron-rust of the chains and anchors that hung from it. The window-panes were darkened by cobwebs and soot-layers and still more by the ancient beam-drill that ran the whole length of the dusty, cell-like place. At the back a ladder staircase led to the loft above and at one end stood the huge open chimney for the enormous smith's bellows which were now fanning into spurts of flame a handful of shavings under the pressure of a boy's hand. Every movement of his black figure was followed by a roaring circle of sparks that filled the dimness with sound and colour and glowed in a fiery halo that irradiated his white eyeballs and red lips.

Michael was holding an iron prong in the fire and presently, with the flash of a red-hot arc from the forge to the anvil, the thin clear hammer music filled the room, in place of the grampus snorts from the bellows. Cutting a section from the glowing metal, he welded into the cavity a small steel bar. This operation he repeated on prong after prong, once flinging aside a flawed one that had "sprung" under the hammer.

Thought-free, Strode was rejoicing in the mastery of straight eye, and deft hand. It is the same satisfaction in measured purpose with which one sees a power-engine crack a nut or set down a weight, only the joy is multiplied a hundred fold when the engine happens to be one's own body. During working-hours the world with all the puzzle of the human coil narrowed to the mere question of the drilling of a hole or the mathematical exactitude of a fitting. With hands much chipped as to skin, and body much strained in muscle, Michael was, in fact, learning how to escape the morbid imagination that gathers up into one uneasy brain all the misery and discomfort of the world.

Pym's regular trade was in agricultural implements, which he bought in separate portions just as they were cast in the foundry, and retailed after they had been fitted in his shop. Occasionally he received orders for the ballasting of yachts, though every year the marine trade was diminishing, passing away from small riverside towns like this to the big centres. Yet even here, old and new met strangely, for the mediaeval open fireplace with its huge, square chimney, the beam drill and the cliff wall cut out of living rock were lit by electric globes and the lathe was driven by electric power.

CHAPTER VI

THE INNER SHRINE

"Yet Fate was kinder far in death;
For though in life denied me,
Yet when she'd drawn her latest breath,
They buried her beside me."

THREE times had Mrs. Strode hummed this ribald verse of Aviolet's ere Cecily turned on her embroidery stool and expostulated.

"How can you be so cheerful, mother?" she exclaimed. "I should have thought that this trouble about Michael would have been enough to depress anyone."

"My dear," said Mrs. Strode, adopting the Buddha attitude, "I feel just pounds better for the letter I wrote to-day. I know enough of myself when I've a wrathful fit on me to wait for a few days before I do anything. Then, if I still feel at the end of a decent interval, that I've a right to be angry, I up and smite the foe. And this time I've smitten him, hip and thigh."

Cecily raised deprecating eyebrows. "Yet all this time, and it seems weeks, you've never said a word. Not even when Michael ruined everything. He really is intensely silly."

"Louis says he's cosmic, you know, not planetary," twinkled Mrs. Strode, "and you and I, my dear child, are so distinctly planetary that we might be called parochial."

"Oh, Louis always uses long words when he doesn't know what he's talking about."

"It's the way with the 'lit'ry gent,' my child. And as for what is called in the town our 'trouble,' to sit down and contemplate Michael is like trying to focus your mind on the top of a mountain. I absolutely refuse to attempt it. And what's more, it can't be done. But wouldn't you like

to hear my letter? It's to your Uncle William and I was so pleased with it that I took a copy of it."

Open-eyed, Cecily stared from her embroidery stool in the cool dusk of the shadowed corner which was full of the scent of dried rose-leaves and fresh lilac. Mrs. Strode chanted in a voice that reminded one of a war slogan:

"My Dear William:—

"I am in receipt of your illuminating letter of the 15th inst. and note your kind offer with respect to Michael's future. I don't, however, expect that he will accept a stool in your office. He is too big for it in more senses than one.

"His decision came at first as a shock to me, but if you think I am not able to trust him, you are altogether mistaken. I am fully convinced that although you and I, humble people as we are, may not be able to understand him, yet he is no mere instrument for the folly of our time to play what tune it pleases on."

"Good phrase, that," murmured Mrs. Strode to herself, "notwithstanding the preposition on which it closes."

"To me, in fact, the age in which we live is a very interesting one, and quite likely to evolve many strange things besides 'aberrations of conduct' in Michael. And as for the atmosphere of free discussion which I am proud to know a lone woman has been able to diffuse about him, I am not one of those who think that the face of truth can be obscured by the fluttering of a few human gadflies. Besides, I am, as you know, constitutionally incapable of leaving anything undiscussed and on the brink of the river of death shall very probably be found trying to analyse the quality of the water to be found therein.

"I hope you do not consider either Michael or myself ungrateful for the pecuniary help you have given him. Without it, he would probably never have been influenced by the wider tendencies of latter-day thought which, *pace* your opinion, my dear William, have had more to do with his eccentric decision than any words of mine.

"I remain,

"Your grateful and affectionate sister,

"Cecilia M. Strode."

"That last paragraph," she said meditatively, "will touch him up more than all the rest, for he likes to think he's quite up to date."

"So," said Cecily, pursing up her lips, "you intend not only to let Michael play ducks and drakes with everything, but you're actually going to fight for him."

"Oh, you're all so day-of-judgment-like about it, that I really must get some fun out of it. Heigho! Cecily, why *did* the Lord make nine-tenths of the human race so serious?"

"Fun, mother! Horrible!"

"My dear Cis," said Mrs. Strode, getting up and encircling the girl's face with her hands, "how can a little smut on his face hurt Michael? I did feel it a bit at first, but now it's amusing to wonder what will be the developments. And, after all, there will always be your uncle to fall back on, whatever happens."

"What! after that letter?"

"Oh, bless you, we've sparred like that all our lives. Billy would think I'd got softening of the brain coming on if I didn't stand up to him a bit."

"Mother," exclaimed Cecily in horror, as a figure passed the window that looked into the garden, "here's Miss Craig coming to tea."

"Never mind, chick, for there's Miss Tracy coming behind her. The Lord who sent the nettle hath provided the dock also. For which bless His holy name! They'll deodorise each other, Alison Craig and Jane Tracy."

Not pausing to elaborate her mixture of metaphors, Mrs. Strode went out to open the door.

By her touselled shock of short black hair, her intense, deep-set eyes and thin, bare neck, Miss Craig was marked out as a prophet of the Solomon Eagle type; more by token, also, she wore the prophet's mantle swaying from her shoulder in a flutter of airy wings whenever she moved quickly. It gave her, she fancied, an atmosphere, or as she would have said, an *aura*, of Olympian zephyrs.

"Ah," she murmured at last, turning towards Mrs. Strode with a cake in her hand which she nibbled like an excited rabbit worrying a lettuce leaf, "I've only just got back from town. I cannot live without these glimpses of a

wider life. And to plunge into the maelstrom of London is like laying the hand on a vibrating dynamo. Ah, that seething cauldron of human life!"

She closed her eyes ecstatically.

"Yes," said Miss Tracy, in her staccato treble, "the crossings *are* bad, particularly at the circuses. Though, really, the police are so marvellous that one scarcely notices the perils through which one is guided."

"I was not referring to the crossings, Miss Tracy, but to the thrill of thought, of vital electricity, if I may so put it, which a sensitive nature feels instantly in these great centres of our population. The new thought, too, ah, how marvellous! The reaching forth in all directions, the processions of unemployed, the clairvoyants, and then those weird people that see *auras*. Oh, it is so fascinating!"

"Particularly the unemployed," said Mrs. Strode, grimly passing the bread-and-butter, "I wonder if they know what a good 'turn' they provide in the national Music Hall."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Strode, you mustn't laugh at me. Poor souls, of course one can hardly bear to think of their stomachs, but then there is so much true sympathy nowadays, don't you think, that something will be sure to be done soon for them. I went to a lecture on Garden Cities last week. Quite a charming man gave it, for he really looked as if he had stepped out of the Pilgrim's Progress, such a square Puritan hat he put on afterwards."

"But," interposed Miss Tracy, desperately conscious of a need to check this lyric outburst of *joie de vivre*, "we have had, if not a busy, at any rate, a blessed time down here, too. The missionary gathering on the fifth was a beautiful effort. You would have enjoyed it immensely, Mrs. Strode. Mr. Baylis would just suit you. He has such a fund of humour, though I really wish he hadn't given me a lasting distaste to sago."

Miss Jean was a plump little Christian who overflowed with the zest of small beer, speaking, of course, strictly in a temperance sense. There was nothing virtuous which she did not enjoy, from milk pudding to champagne, from missionaries to carriage callers and from the dear bishops to the sweet animals, the latter of whom, however, she ate upon occasion. Her relatives were perhaps a trial to her,

for being exceedingly amorous and prolific, they overburdened her with as many nephews, nieces and grandnephews as were ever accredited to a mediaeval pope.

"To sago?" said Cecily sweetly.

"Yes, my dear, you see he described—marvellous gift of description he has, too—how the natives ate poor dear Mr. Crowther in a sort of a *consommé* or *potage* of sago. Quite distressing," she twinkled, looking as excited as a mouse that sees cheese in the larder. "Oh, it was delightful, too, for he told us of an old chief who rather overdid it in the marrying line, for he had ten wives, and was obliged to send for his mother to keep them in order. That was at the meeting for men only. Oh, yes, I insisted on going to it, for I said that really I'd read so many lives of missionaries that there couldn't be anything too improper for me to hear. But I have given orders that never, on any account, is sago-pudding to be served at my table. One can, you see, always fall back on semolina."

"And, after all," remarked Mrs. Strode, "to sacrifice one's sago on the mission field is no harder than to offer up one's common sense there. That's been done before now."

Miss Craig, like everyone else, entirely missed the point. "Ah," she sneered, under the impression that she was saying something very cutting, "but you don't realise what a deprivation the want of sago may be to a devout soul."

She herself fed mainly on proteid foods, and her friends, when they observed her scragginess, were in the habit of remarking that she undoubtedly neglected the fatty foods. For with the progress of food reform it becomes quite awkward to enter a drawing-room, since one's friends seize, metaphorically, on one's carcase and observe its defects so scientifically.

"But, oh, Mrs. Strode," said Miss Craig ecstatically, "how very charming this is that I hear about your son. So original, striking out on a line for himself like that. Actually wielding a hammer in a forge. Much more striking than leaving off his clothes. I mean," she hastened to explain, "going barefoot, or anything hygienic of that sort."

Cecily moved restlessly, while Mrs. Strode laughed.

"He didn't do it for the sake of being original," she said.

"Ah," cooed Miss Tracy, with a rapt gaze, "what a

missionary he would have made! With that zeal, that thoroughness of his, for I understand that he contemplates becoming a foundry owner and is merely desirous of mastering the business."

"Oh, surely, with such Herculean muscles, such Atlantean shoulders," cried Miss Craig, "he must be meaning something more, if one may put it so, of the wind of the zeitgeist than that!"

"Scepticism and Socialism," said Miss Tracy, "that is the spirit of this age. Ah, what a comfort it is, what a rest to the soul, to meet a man of God in this land of atheists and scoffers. I will send you a pamphlet by Mr. Baylis on the Three F's."

"What are the Three F's, Cecily?" asked Mrs. Strode, after their visitors had gone. "Folly, Femininity, and Feebleness, or what?"

"Miss Tracy is a dear," said Cecily, half inclined to burst into tears of vexation at the laughter in her mother's eyes and the general friction of the afternoon. "She changed her first-class ticket to London the other day for a third, in order to help a mother with two crying babies on the journey up. But Miss Craig, ah, what an unspeakable thing!"

"Alison Craig, my dear," said Mrs. Strode, "is a woman for whom I'm very sorry. She has brains, but she's been forced to exercise them in a vacuum all her life and now she's nothing herself but a windbag. If she had been obliged to toil at a profession, she would have some meaning in her. Now she's nothing but an interrogation mark, asking the Almighty what on earth He made her for?"

"Oh, I feel horrid," moaned Cecily. "It's so undignified to have them go on about us like that."

"Cis, there's Louis coming in," said Mrs. Strode softly. "I'm going out, so you'll have to be nice to him."

But Cecily had already slipped out of the room and was half-way up the square oak staircase by the time Aviolet had reached the door. It was quite a long time before she appeared again and in the interval Louis became thoroughly nervous.

"I've been asking mother to take some hypophosphites to the Bovey child," she explained, giving him a cool hand.

"Patent medicines and creeds are very much alike, don't you think?" he said, blundering as usual.

"Why?" she asked sharply.

"Both are surely nothing but measures of man's credulity."

"Creeds are, I trust, something more to me than affairs of mere credulity," said Cecily with dignity, crossing the room to her embroidery, a move that Louis hated, for when she was at work he could not see her eyes.

"As I think you know," she added, in a tone that said 'you meant to wound,' quite plainly.

"Yes, I suppose," said Louis, restlessly fidgetting, "they're milestones set up to mark the way we've travelled. Hang it! wouldn't the Athanasian creed in stone make a monumental milestone?"

Then the words "monumental milestone" began to hum in his brain, till somehow they changed their burden into "monumental ass."

"Do you talk like this because you want to hurt, Louis?" she asked, stopping her work because her fingers were trembling.

"You know I don't. But I always say the wrong thing, get on the wrong tack with you. See, Cis, I'm sorry," he said. "Do stop that damned embroidery. It gives me pins and needles up the spine to see you always at it."

Cecily prided herself on her good breeding and the essence of that is to make no show of emotion before the world. Louis being, for the time, the world, she walked over to the table to hide her face and took up a book. Opening it, she read the title page. It was a brochure on the Causes of Poverty and the sight of it seemed to give the last push to her hidden distress.

"Oh, why should we be always harassed in this way?" she exclaimed. "It hangs over one like a thunder-cloud, perpetually the poor, the poor, the poor. Whenever I want a new dress, mother brings out some report of hundreds of homeless people waiting in the night for a drop of soup and a bit of bread, and then I have to get a cheap dress. It's all this, you know, that has driven Michael stark, staring mad. He took me last year to see the crowd at the dock gates that were waiting and struggling with one another for a job, like

toads in a hole. It's nothing but a nightmare. They take all the pleasure out of everything, these wretched people. I do really think something ought to be done to put the poor down. It's just a law of God that they should always be, and it's nothing but Atheism to go against it. Besides, one can always be kind to them, you know."

"A trifle inadequate," hazarded Louis timidly.

But Cecily was like a river in spate.

"And Michael never thinks of us, of mother and me. We have to pinch and toil, because she never will take a penny from Uncle William that isn't for Michael's career. Career! what career has he now? If he'd take a profession he could do almost anything and then we could have lived in proper style."

Louis thought miserably of his specimen tin full of butter, of his Sophoclean dust-bin and the other simplicities of his domestic interior.

"Don't forget," said he at last, "that people all live on totally different planes and that living on one plane means that you feel one kind of call being made on your energies and someone on another plane feels quite a different one. You feel yours to be to go to church and feel good and do your embroidery, but Michael, you see, feels the call of the world."

"And mother and I don't count?"

"Not much. Not before the need of all these millions." He struck the book on the table. "Cis," he said, laying his long, slim hand over her two trembling ones that were pushing a lilac head into a little grave in the thick table-cloth, "do you know what my call is?"

She shook her head while two tears rolled down her face and splashed on her blouse.

"To look after you," he said gravely.

She burst into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, Louis, Louis," she cried, "you really are so funny. Why, my dear boy, it's just you yourself that want looking after and so do your collars and your socks and your meals and your very, very filthy pipes."

"Then come and do it," he said, promptly impounding her hands more firmly. "You know I ask nothing better. Oh, yes, I'm a slacker, but I won't be then. I'll work eight

hours a day, good, steady, hack-work. I'll get appointed to a paper. I'll rush round and get reviewing. I'll put my head in harness like a dray-horse."

"And," she said dimpling, "all the time you'll feel that I've taken away—what do you call it?—the divine afflatus, for which you're always supposed to be waiting. But what you really do is to wait till you've got to the last ounce of shag and the last pinch of Force and then you dash off a sketch just in time to catch the last mail. No, Louis, I couldn't put such a Pegasus as you in harness."

"Cecily," he said, holding the hands that fluttered now in his like a bird, "do you know the most wonderful of all the dreams ever dreamt on earth?"

With downcast eyes she waited.

"The dream of the dual life," he said, "of the life where the body's union is nothing to the unity of the heart, where the woman-soul is knit to the man-soul, closer than the heart in the body, closer than anything ever known in the world. And all the rough jars of the world can never shake them apart, nor all the leagues of sea or land ever separate them, once knit."

"It's only a dream, Louis."

"Shall we not dream it together, love? Dream it for years till it becomes a reality to us. For that's where most lovers make their mistake. They think the true oneness is in that first bodily bliss. And for many that's all there is. That's god-like, divine enough, but you and I, Cis, will try for something higher. For there's the wonderful life of lovers that, year by year, grow slowly liker, each to each, Cecily!"

"Louis, I didn't know you'd speak like this. It awes me. For you, and Michael, and mother, too, in some ways, just frighten me."

"Tell me," he said, with his face close to hers and holding her hand as though it were a child's.

"I'm afraid with you," she whispered. "Yes, with you most of all. I like pictures of little cosy scenes, where you can see the door and the window and hear the buzzing inside the panes. It's a life like that which I want. To say my Belief and to have——"

"Settled the wonder of the universe. Yes," he mur-

mured. He had not expected such subtlety from Cecily, for he had taken Mrs. Strode's estimate of her too seriously.

"But you are like a great wide scene, where the clouds gather and the winds blow and there are no walls, no sheltered corners. Everything comes and goes and I'm lost. It's like that with Michael, too, only more so. No, Louis, I want order, peace, settled things."

"Lines and boundaries to define the Eternal and creeds to confine Him in. Yes."

He felt as though a door had been slammed in his face, for there was more truth in her words than he cared to confess. The perception made him bitter and reckless.

"You want," said he, with the stammer that came upon him when he felt brutal, "the type of man who might be called the salvation of England. He would be your *alter ego*. The man who values a desirable villa residence more than anything else on earth. That's the fellow that's made England, for nothing destroys the caste principle more effectually than the struggle to get and keep that villa, and a nation where caste is cast-iron is on the down grade."

With the horrible jangle of his own last words ringing in his ears, he stood miserably rubbing the back of his head.

"I don't understand you," said Cecily, drawing herself away and feeling as though he had wafted her up on a cloud and then dashed her down on a very hard pile of newly-broken stones.

"I'm a beast. But the sight of you seems to go to my head so that I say whatever comes uppermost. I really think I feel like David dancing before the Ark when I am with you."

With which very improper simile he stood still, penitently gazing at her. But Cecily walked firmly towards the door. Before she could touch the handle, he was upon her like a whirlwind.

"Forgive me," he cried, "and come out for a row. You're tired. You've been working all day. We're both feeling horrible. Come out."

She faced him for a moment till her eyes fell, and he saw that a pilot would some day come aboard that fair vessel, *The Cecily*. He even fancied, for a second, that he could hazard a guess at the name of that pilot. It was therefore

with dancing eyes and a queer twist on his lips that he waited while she fetched a cloak.

The disc of the setting sun was flooding the water with purple and turning the lighters on the river into figures of burnished ebony. Flaming hands on the sky-line had painted the outlines of pinnacles and temples in the red cloud-shapes that rose from the gold. Silently they watched the glory fade, as the boat floated seaward into the greyness of the evening. For a long time there was nothing to be heard but the hiss of waters and the sound of the oars in the rowlocks.

At length through the film of cloud there shone the first faint hint of moonbeams. Still Louis feared to break the stillness, for upon himself and the girl opposite him there seemed to be falling a magic sense of intimacy that words would only spoil.

"The sea," said Cecily, at last, "you can hear the distant murmur of it from here. It is cruel, terrible, like that sunset. It is all like you, too big for me, too far away."

Louis held his breath; to him it was a moment more sacred far than that of any physical caress, for Cecily, inarticulate usually, was trying to admit him to the sanctuary of those instincts that lie deeper than thought: the barrier between them was going down.

"The sea cares nothing for pain, it will torture a woman with dread all night and in the morning toss her dead at her feet," she went on. "But it's only like all Nature. Look how the living gulls torture the maimed ones, how men hurt women, and women are cruel to little children."

"What is it, Cecily?" said Louis, speaking as quietly as though he were talking to one in a trance.

"I suppose I mean Nature," she said half gropingly. "Oh, I know you glorify it and despise my fears. But I like to escape from it.—Over the threshold of some quiet church, there's a different feeling altogether."

"The brooding dove of peace," said Louis softly.

"You say that? Then you feel it, too?" she cried eagerly. "And yet——"

"And yet I blaspheme, make parodies of things too holy to you for ordinary words, still less jesting ones? To you it's ribald, hateful? That's it, isn't it?"

He saw her dark head nod against the wide grey background.

"Don't you understand, Cecily, that for some people laughter is the only way of escaping the pressure of the mystery of things? And when one is absolutely sure of a thing, it's then that one may dare to blaspheme it."

"Louis, what is there that you believe in? Oh, don't put me off with a whirl of words that I cannot understand. They hurt me. There's mother who finds nothing too big or too little to be discussed in one and the same moment. She'll tell you in one breath how to jug hare and then laugh at me for being 'pious.' And not a minute will have passed before she'll be talking of the way the world was made, as if there couldn't possibly be any place for a God in it. And I look outside," she pointed to the sea and sky, "and it seems as if there were nothing but a blind force there that just—crushes. And then I shrink from—things that she finds only natural."

It was touching too delicate a nerve for Louis to ask what things, though he guessed. Metaphorically he had cast off his shoes here, for the ground was holy. Never in all her young life had Cecily admitted anyone to that inner shrine which is the heart of a personality and before it he drew his breath delicately, as though too strong a sigh might blow away a thistledown.

Even now a smile of derision at the irony of things floated across his face, for it was a strange fate that entrusted to him the keys of a maiden heart. Yet in essentials he knew himself to be not unworthy; it was, in fact, his order of knighthood and at the accolade he lifted his head as one who feels the morning wind.

"Louis," asked the small voice that thrilled into Aviolet's heart like a long-drawn note from a violin, "is mother right? How could mere whirling atoms ever make us feel, all that we do feel?"

"All the thrill of the infinite, you mean, Cecily," said Aviolet, finding words for her groping, "such as you feel in your quiet church, as I feel now in the dusk with you, or as we all feel in the uplift of great lives. No, little one, no whirling of mere material atoms, marvellous as they are in their separate life, can ever account for those things."

"What do you believe, then?"

"I never asked myself, but I will now. I think it's this, Cecily, that all this visible world is interpenetrated everywhere with the spiritual, not only bathed in it as in a sea of air, but filled with it in every part as a cup full of wine. So behind the mystery of the flesh and the suns is a thing greater still in wonder, an undying power that created these and will outlast them when the suns shall have vanished and the flesh shall have ceased to sting. As yet we see but the coarest envelope of the eternal Force that whirled the universe into being."

"Why?"

"The Force alone knows, Cecily. Yet, I think, the purpose is just Life, ever more and more Life."

"A Force? That's cold and mighty and far away. It is more lonely than the sunset. I want nearness, help, strength. Oh, Louis, you know what I mean."

In the silence, the winged thoughts wove their mystery around the rocking boat as Louis bent motionless over his oars.

In a low voice he asked at length: "Is there, then, Cecily, such a thing as a separate life?"

"No," she answered slowly. "We are very close, so close——"

"That we merge in one, you and I," said Louis gently, "and not you and I only. For although we may be more conscious of our oneness than others are, yet the life in me, in you, in all, is in strange brotherhood. Loneliness is, indeed, the one thing you can get nowhere, not on the farthest, the least accessible height."

"Turn the boat round," said Cecily suddenly.

He obeyed, understanding fully that no more words were bearable just then, and though she was so close that the mystery of twin life had been achieved, he felt no impulse to move nearer to her. For physical nearness is but a half-god to the divinity of a nearness such as theirs.

He rowed back in silence. Then as they drew near the shipway, he said:

"Have you any idea what a great night this has been to me?"

She was silent for a moment while the wind rocked the

boat quietly, till against the familiar background of yellow gables she saw the tenderness in his eyes, as he gave her his hand to land.

"It has made the world a sanctuary," he said, as they stood hand in hand while the throbbing of their pulses ratified the union of the mind. But her white face was so strained that he ventured no nearer approach.

At the top of the causeway she exclaimed:

"I had forgotten. I promised to go and see a poor woman to-night. How unkind she will think me."

"I will go with you and wait for you," he said. As they turned off the Strand they looked in, across geraniums and cactus plants, at the low cottage rooms, lamp-lit now in the still dusk.

"Isn't it a dear place?" said Cecily, with a tremble in her voice, for she had forgotten, in the joy of this night, all the social ambitions that Michael had thwarted. For the homely thud of wooden cradle-rockers, the sleepy hum of voices, explained Louis and herself in some dim way; all this was sanctuary, as he had said.

As Aviolet watched the girl later on in the cottage, with a dark, downy head cradled on her arm, he suddenly shivered and turned away. For other hands than his were leading Cecily past the terror of Nature's way; he knew this, when he heard her suddenly laugh, and bending, place her lips over the baby's half-open mouth. When she came out to him there was an aureole of dignity about her that he had never seen in her before.

That night in her own room Cecily took a folded paper from her desk and laid it out on the cushioned window-seat before her. She knew it almost by heart, yet she read it again, for it was a copy of verses by Aviolet that Michael had read aloud to his mother one night, ribald verses, so they seemed to her, yet written by the Louis of this night who had found the earth a sanctuary and whose eyes had called her sacred.

"Oh, I can't understand," she whispered, "how he can have two sides to him like that. If only he were always as he was to-night. Yet many people wouldn't like him so. They much prefer the Louis who could write this."

She struck the offending paper and read it once more,

while slowly, half against her will, a smile dawned, for it is wonderful what you can teach yourself to enjoy:—

THE MAIDEN'S PROGRESS.

Once on a time a maid I knew,
And though full young—her years were two—
Her upturned nose and holy face
Proclaimed she walked in ways of grace.
Her faith was firm, conviction sure,
Her doctrine wonderfully pure.
Her subtle mind perceived the flaw
In church established by the law,
Th' intoned response, the surpliced choir
Were Satan's lures to feed Hell fire.
Nor could her fervid spirit brook
To read her prayers from out a book.
"No prayers can reach the Deity,"
She held, "unless extempore."
And when she lisped her Watts' hymn
You read "dissent" in every limb.

The years went by, alas! the day
When from her home she went away
Across the sea to foreign lands.
'Mid thinkers free and German bands
She learned to scoff, and wicked doubt
She swallowed with her sauer-kraut.
The sausages were stuffed with rant
From Schopenhauer, Hegel, Kant.
The cynic smile, the sceptic sneer
Were soon imbibed with lager beer.
Dissent no longer stirred her soul,
She mixed her doctrines in the bowl.
She joins in waltz or sinful jig,
She puffs the atheistic cig.
She stalks the links in shocking knicks
And drives the ball with godless sticks.
With fiendish zeal she sets her face
To urge the bike's indecent pace.
Confounding man, she apes his shirts.
And halves the substance of her skirts.

And now alas! at twenty-one
Her downward course is well-nigh run.
I see, 'mid cassock, stole and band,

The shadow of a curate's hand.
With Jesuit craft and unctuous face
He inculcates false views of grace;
To bow the knee, to cross the breast;
The need to be by priest confessed.
All these and worse, and when at length
Her soul is sapped and lost its strength,
He'll gently press her yielding hand
To guide her to the Better Land;
And kiss her soft white cheek, to prove
Divine is one with human love.
And sinful Jessie yields the strife
And ends a High Church Curate's wife!"

Cecily's last prayer that night was unspoken, but thoroughly heartfelt. It ran somewhat to this effect: "God, give me a sense of humour, but if that's impossible, please let me think that everything Louis does is right."

She awoke next morning to the gleam of the sunlight that was flooding her white-washed, cell-like room. Outside the window was a wonderful whiteness of pear blossom that tapped against the wall and reached feathery arms of translucent glory towards the sun. From the river came the *Yeo, heave ho,* of men at the windlass and the creaking tackle sounded of the sea. She lay to greet the beauty of the morning, while in a sudden flash of inner light she felt she was not alone. Bending lower, lower, lower, till the blood throbbed faint in her veins she seemed to feel her lover, while her heart sang Louis, Louis, Louis, to the thrush's note outside.

It was all nearly as good as a sense of humour and it seemed extremely likely that the Almighty would at least give ear to the second half of her petition.

CHAPTER VII

THE MOUSE TRAP

"So that," said Louis Aviolet, softly closing his door behind him, "is Miss Bowcher's convent-bred niece. Now, by all the houris in Paradise, in what portion of her anatomy did a woman with a steel trap for a mouth secrete so rare a pearl?"

Fresh from a bewildering encounter with youth on the staircase of the house where he lodged, he sat down to try and recall all that he knew of his landlady's relatives. Even as he did so there came from the other side of the landing the thud, thud of the rockers of an Amerịcan chair and he could hear, at least in fancy, the swish of petticoats that accompanied it. Luxuriously closing his eyes, that his ears might more comfortably enjoy the titillation of these sounds, he was suddenly electrified by the jingle of a piano that poured out a flood of clear, vibrating notes.

"*Mon Dieu*," growled he, "so that's what I shall have to put up with, now that minx has turned up. I wonder why she *has* turned up just now, by the way? What's Madame's game, I wonder, for I don't believe that woman ever did anything without a motive."

Madame Lesueur, the sister of Aviolet's landlady, was somewhat of a mystery in Upham, to which she paid occasional flying visits, staying with her sister in the guise of a great lady in search of rest. Though she was certainly middle-aged, her clear white face was as wrinkleless as though she had never smiled, her crinkled hair as untouched with grey as though she had never felt. Yet, underneath this rigid mask, one divined something more volcanic than ever lived under the network of lines that petty perturbations weave. She was, in her bold strength, the greatest possible contrast to her sister, Miss Bowcher, who always blinked in the sunlight like a rat whose drain-pipe has

suddenly been split open by a pick-axe—only her drain-pipe was a stuffy dressmaker's room, half underground and never visited by the bright daylight, while Madame Lesueur's silk-rustling clothes were matched by the elegant confidence of self-possessed manners that nothing but genius or a healthy bank balance can impart. Madame quite possibly had both, for though she had started life as a lady's maid in Jersey, she was now a well-known modiste, whose gold-scrawled *Lesueur* conferred a true patent of nobility on the gowns she designed. It was counted to her for righteousness that she "never forgot she was a Bowcher"—merely spelling the name Bouchier and insisting on its county origin. It was more to the point, however, that she often made herself useful to her sister in the humble little trade carried on in the house next the Passage Inn.

But if the mother was unusual, the daughter was bewildering; there was a brilliance about her that reminded Aviolet of the vibrating sheen of some scintillating winged creature. He remained wrapt in bewilderment while the notes of the piano pursued him like the buzzing of a thousand gadflies. Then the roulades changed to the haunting appeal of *Samson and Delilah* and Aviolet's tense muscles relaxed. At last there came an emphatic bang of a chord, a still more emphatic bang of a door and the rustle of skirts, real ones this time, passing down the staircase. After a decent interval Aviolet opened his door and followed. It was true that he was out of tobacco, but the more pressing need was to satisfy his curiosity.

The butterfly effect of the figure in front of him was still further heightened by the blue lingerie hat that waved on the girl's head.

"That's where Madame shows in her," said Aviolet to himself, as he watched the firm tread with which the girl walked on preposterous heels, a tread as firm as though she were walking barefoot on the sand. "Madame Lesueur walks just like that. Firm, steady, with no looking backward, as remorselessly as Madame Defarge."

He began to admire his own powers of observation and to conceive of an interest in Mademoiselle quite apart from the mere petticoat thrill he had at first experienced.

Up the Strand they passed, between the houses of many

gables and the tangled river-side gardens, a maze of hop-poles, figure-heads and clothes-lines, while aproned women in the doorways nodded to Aviolet and turned from him to gaze, open-mouthed, at the bird of paradise he was stalking. Soon overtaking her, he lifted his hat, and said: "May I introduce myself? We live in the same house, you know. I am Louis Aviolet."

"And I," she said with a curious smile that lifted the upper lip in a bow, "am Elise Lesueur. Such an escape, wasn't it, that they didn't call me Augustine?" She boomed out the syllable resonantly, "or Célestine, or even Marie Angélique. For you see I am not auguste, or céleste or angélique, but as Elise, petite Elise, I do very well."

Like a silver bell, her tone did just what a tone ought to do: it lingered on the ear, till one received from it the perception of a personality. She had the true secret of charm, for she made others see her as she saw herself, that was—small, nestling, dainty.

"You write books," she chattered on. "I've heard of them, but I don't read. Not I. Oh, they tried to teach me at the school in England——such things! They are so lanky and big-boned, these English teachers. And they wear flannel blouses."

"Mademoiselle does not approve of flannel blouses?"

"But yes, for them. They have long legs, long bodies. They play cricket, hockey, football, I know not what. They talk in words yards long, such words. They cut the flowers to pieces. But the Sisters of my convent, they are plump and merry, merrier far than the English schoolmistresses, though both are celibate. *Ma foi*, they cannot—" She laughed.

"Do what?" asked Louis fatuously. His mind was vibrating between Cecily of the fair composure and this—cocotte, houri, innocent, he knew not which.

"Look out of the corners of their eyes," she interjected. Suddenly she was, of all things, the John the Baptist of Leonardo da Vinci, mouth upward-curving, eyes glancing cornerwise, hair alive to the ultimate tendril.

Watch ninety-nine women out of a hundred walk down the street and you can tell exactly the books they read, the ambitions they cherish, the homes they live in. Of this

girl, on the contrary, one asked endless questions. Obvious cultivation, even affectation, in her manner, yet how much of it was sheer simplicity? To what end, this coming-on disposition of hers? It was difficult to read anything in the shadows of those velvety dark eyes, under the auburn hair, for about them there was nothing of the limpid clearness of still water that is the charm of simpler women. She was a fortress, this Elise Lesueur, a fortress with drawbridge up and arrow slits veiled, till, by mishap, the arrow itself quivered between the joints of a man's armour.

"Do you know, Miss Lesueur," said Aviolet, "that somehow I can't place you down here? You don't seem in the picture at all."

"That's because my mother makes dresses, I suppose," she said, with a contemptuous lift of the chin that made her quite a different woman.

"You know I didn't mean that. No, I meant—it's frightfully difficult to plank down an impression—that you are so emphatically a townswoman that you look, down here, like a hot-house plant. Don't you feel it yourself?"

She nodded. "That's why I enjoy myself here more than in towns," she answered naïvely. "For here they look at me, and all the old men over fifty and all the boys under twenty do fall in love with me."

"Rather dull, that, I should say," murmured Louis.

"But I'm proud of my mother, whatever you may think," she continued, turning to the original point. "She's the cleverest woman I've ever met. And yet women who don't know how to put on a jabot turn up their noses at her. Why, do you know I had to leave a school for the daughters of gentlemen, because it leaked out that my mother had *Robes* on her doorplate, and yet she'd been dressing the principal as she'd never been dressed in her life before, and never will again—for nothing, so that I might get the benefit of her precious school. Such a school! They didn't know Chopin from a five-finger exercise. Oh!" she exclaimed, breaking off and standing rapturously in front of a cottage window filled with plates of nuts and sweets. "There are shrimps, positively shrimps and I haven't tasted one for years. Let's go in and get some."

Shrimps turned out to be long treacly peppermints with a nut enshrined in the middle.

"How easily one tires of them," she sighed, as she tossed the remainder of her handful to the urchins outside. "Do you think there is anything in the world one doesn't tire of?" she asked, looking up at him plaintively. "Mr. Aviolet, do you know what it is to have been away from your home for years and then to come back to childhood again? I am renewing such a number of impressions. For instance, there was a smith's shop down there. Ah, there it is," she cried, as the signboard marked: 'Pym, Ship and General Smith,' creaked over their heads. But Louis hurried on; he was by no means anxious to bring a hot-house plant into the air of the forge.

"Then," she continued, "there were the Strodes. Big Michael and I went fishing one day, only he caught all the fish. He was nice, but I was jealous of Cecily. I looked rough beside her. We were allowed to play together, but now, it would be different," she shrugged. "They're gentry folk, of course, and I'm—" she held out a white hand—"down."

"Cecily would never be like that nor, indeed, Michael," said Aviolet. "You mistake them quite."

Then he paused, feeling it quite impossible to cope with the large matter of the Strodes before this piece of quick-silver.

"Ah, but Cecily was *dévote*," she said, "and," she added, seeing his eyes, "you like Cecily, oh, very much."

"I do," he smiled down at her. "But how did you know it?"

It was the first time his heart had warmed to this piece of impudence that walked by his side.

"Oh, such things are my *métier*, being a girl. Your *métier* is, of course, the big things, the things that make the world go round, money, politics, all the *affaires*, I know."

Elise's heart was beating fast as she went upstairs to her room. There, taking off her walking dress, she slipped on a kimono and flinging herself on the bed, allowed her fancy to flit to the sweet delights of men, to Aviolet, to Michael, even

to the old captain of the *Good Intent*, who had smiled at her as she passed his wharf. Gradually thought passed into sleep.

Outside, in the long rays of westering sunlight that shone blue on stretches of wet sand and burnt fiery-red on the breasts of sea-gulls, there sounded the pipe of nesting birds, the nursing cry of the lambs answered by the deeper tremolo of the ewes; inside there crackled the busy whisper of a wreck-wood fire that fed on the salty planks sawn from a coaster's ribs. Even now from the wood that had known the beat of the waves and the straining pull of the tackle there came a faint savour of pitch.

In the centre of the firelight that danced across the room stood an old swing looking-glass, full length in size, that seemed in some strange way to have acquired a conscious life of its own, so many were the women who had seen themselves reflected on its surface, while they watched the slow smiles rise into their eyes from depths of joy or mockery within. For this was pre-eminently a woman's room, one of those upper chambers which, whether tucked away amid smoky warrens of houses or full of the murmur of trees, still lure men's fancies with a thrill as primitive as though civilisation had never been.

At last Elise rose and pausing in front of the mirror, stood with her arms outspread in a curve behind her while she swayed backwards and forwards on her heels, watching the wing-like movement of the drapery that hung from her arms. Then, suddenly changing her pose, she lifted her skirt slightly and smiling, made a curtsey to her own image in the glass, a curtsey dignified enough to crave the grace of hoops and patches.

There are some women whom merely to see is to wonder what strange moment of passion can have begotten them, women whose presence fills one with the far-off memories of some Eastern scent. They are by no means always beautiful, these women, and they are often to be found in strange places, for out of the eyes of the mere drudge, or of the woman seer, raised apparently above all the sorrow of craving, there may peep once and again that look of intimate hunger for some birthright foregone. Girl as she was, Elise had the look at times, on a face whose lips were firm

enough to suggest cruelty and whose jaw was heavy enough to define resolve.

Through the two open bow-windows of the room came the noise of the working of a plane. Crossing the room quickly Elise banged both windows down with a frown, for she resented the ugly suggestions of the work-a-day world as an affront to her delicacy of nature. Then for a moment she stood peeping between the lace curtains.

The last sunrays were turning the river into a line of pewter and burning red-brown on the sedges inland where the rushes bent to the chill wind that had come with the turning of the tide. Gulls wheeled against the western hills and screamed in the hiss of the up-flowing river as they fished in the eddying current. Poised heavily above an inlet where the water lapped against reed-grown piles, a heron watched.

Turning at the noise of the opening door, Elise said:

"So, mother, you lit my fire while I was asleep! Very good of you. And now I am quite ready for my tea."

From the quiet indifference of her tones she might have been addressing a maid, but Mrs. Lesueur was evidently accustomed to it and merely went away to fetch the tea-tray.

"China!" cried Elise, with a grimace, as she put her lips to the first cup, "how I wish you wouldn't insist upon my drinking such nasty stuff."

"All the best people drink it now," said Mrs. Lesueur, calmly. "You will have to get accustomed to it. Besides, no one who values her complexion would drink Indian."

Mrs. Lesueur prided herself on two things—her intimacy with the very newest whims of that world where they seem to have nothing to do save to follow fashions and her acquaintance with all the tricks by which a woman can keep herself in a constant state of polish. She had, in fact, an instinct, as she would have put it, "of the *atelier* of fashion," and gathered styles in collars and waist-lines as instinctively as a bookish man accumulates book news.

"I do hope," she continued, "that you use the skin-food I sent you. Turn round to the light. Yes," she said meditatively, as Elise obeyed, "there really is a roughness in the grain of your skin that ought not to be there."

"I do wish," said Elise pettishly, "that you wouldn't look at me as though you were buying a horse. I saw a dealer at Rouen going on just like you the other day, only he poked up the thing's lips to look at its teeth."

"Perhaps it would be advisable for you to see a dentist," said Mrs. Lesueur, who was totally devoid of the faintest ripple of humour. "Such looks as you possess should be most carefully preserved."

She spoke with the gingerly precision, the smooth equability of the long black manikins who sail about a showroom.

"Such looks as I have," mocked Elise. "Nonsense, mother, you know they can't be beaten. I found that out whenever we walked. *Ma foi*, didn't the heads turn when little Elise went by! And didn't the good Sisters want to swear when they saw all the lovely frilly things I have! *Ciel!* to see my nighty laid out under the dismal black crucifixes and things they set up in the dormitories over our beds! But I always covered my own particular one with a petticoat before I got into bed. And the long waving curtains over your pillow aren't unbecoming. But now, mother, let's get to work! You know I haven't had any frocks for ages. And I want a walking suit, directoire, and oh, a *vieux rose* and that lovely smoked grey tint. Quick, mother, get the patterns."

"Yes," said Mrs. Lesueur, "the *nuances* are most exquisite this season."

"Mother, you are really wonderful," cried Elise, as some time later the two emerged from a discussion of materials and styles. "You seem to know by instinct the right thing for one. But, oh! I do wish you wouldn't banish me down here in this poky little hole, when I ought to be sweeping about the Park. It's just a nightmare to think I've got to stay here."

"Yet," said Mrs. Lesueur, eyeing the girl narrowly, "you came in flushed from your walk and when I looked in you were smiling in your sleep. Come here," she said, changing her manner suddenly and drawing her daughter up to the glass, "look at yourself. Do you call *that* common? Don't you think that, between us, we'll make something of it? I was beautiful once, but I was never like that. Why, you

little brainless fool, don't you know that you've got what great ladies up and down the world would give all they have to gain? That you have what women scrape and polish and rub and massage and electrify to have—and don't get then? Bah! they corset and pinch and pad and fret and plan and rush about to this new quack or that. And you've got it without lifting a finger—by the grace of God, I suppose. And down here, in this village, you'll have a better chance than in town, though you mayn't think so."

Elise gazed at her own reflection with wide, unseeing eyes, while her mother watched her between narrowed eyelids.

"When you were born," went on Mrs. Lesueur, a strange, cruel pleasure in her tones, "I was very ill. They thought I was dying. I should have, but for one thing."

The fire crackled and gave out a flame. In its light Elise felt the hard, fierce will that lived beneath silk and whalebone and crimped hair.

"I was lying the night after you were born, sinking deeper and deeper into the quietness that, I suppose, comes before death. The sounds outside and in the room had all faded one by one. The tapping of the blind against the open window was the last to go, I remember. Then it was all quite still. In a few more moments I should have gone."

There was a silence while Elise held her breath.

"I'm glad I didn't," said Mrs. Lesueur suddenly, harshly.

"Why didn't you?"

"Up through the darkness there came a sound; very far away, it seemed. Then, it came nearer and nearer, till 'twas quite close by. I knew in a minute what it was. It was your father making my coffin. They thought I was dying and he was—glad I was going."

"My father—making your coffin! But why should he?"

Mrs. Lesueur laughed. "It was his trade," she said harshly, "he had a shop in St. Helier. You see you haven't a very exalted origin, my dear."

Elise was silent. Then she exclaimed:

"But, mother, you couldn't *know* what he felt."

"I tell you I did. Knew it, knew it for a sure and certain thing. He never denied it, for I sent for him. And then I

cursed him. Oh, yes, you may laugh. It sounds funny, I suppose, for me to do anything so—so stagey, I that never wanted a child or to have anything so horrible as birth or death about me. Yes, I cursed him. I never knew where the words came from, but they did. From outside, it almost seemed. He was always coming after me, always pressing what he called his love on me. He, a common carpenter, and I'd had a different sort of men after me, before that. He used to lecture me about wifely duty and he wanted children. Well, he got his child and nearly killed me in getting it. And then, when the 'Nature' that he was always preaching about had done for me, he went out and —made my coffin. I tell you, he was just a sickly brute, and I told him so. After that I never spoke to him again. And slowly he lost his wits. He stayed so for seventeen years. He spent his time making boxes, fitting corner to corner. He never spoke, nor heard a sound—apparently."

The girl did not move, for she was wildly angry with her mother for having forced on her such a piece of naked nature. Elise was her mother's child and, girl as she was, fully sympathised with the revolt implied, while at the same time she resented its expression.

"Elise," said Mrs. Lesueur at length.

"Yes, mother."

"I oughtn't to have told you."

In the firelight the woman's face looked haggard. To see it annoyed the girl more than ever.

"Elise, can't you speak?" she said at last.

"What is there to say?" asked the girl sullenly. "It's a horrid story and such things ought to be kept underground. Doesn't anyone here know it?"

"Not one. It was all over years ago in Jersey. An old client of Madame Lapaire, where I learnt my trade, took me up and I got on. That's all."

"Thank Heaven!" said Elise. "But oh! to escape from it all! But there must be a way for me to get out of it. Yes, I'm beautiful, but what good's that to me. It'll only get me another man like the one you had. How vile it all is!"

"There is one certain way of power for a woman such as you will be, Elise, a way as certain now, for all their talk,

as it was hundreds of years ago. Oh, when I was with Madame I read. I didn't know much, but one thing I did learn and that is that for a woman there is but one way to everything she wants—and that's through a man. I tell you, men will give a woman everything she asks for, when she's a woman like you."

"You found it answer, didn't you?" sneered Elise.

"Ah, but you needn't make my mistake. You see in one way, I liked your father and wanted to make him happy, only he couldn't be happy my way. You mustn't make that mistake. You must never let yourself care, not care so that any man's the one thing that makes you happy. Just say to yourself when you find *that* coming on—it will spoil my looks, spoil my happiness, take away the taste of things for me, if I think too much of him. Just look at how women grow old and frumpish because they're fools. I'll not be a fool—you say that to yourself and mean it. You understand, don't you?"

"Yes," said Elise. And she did thoroughly, for she had been born and bred in the atmosphere of cunning femininity that reckons just how far it can play into Nature's hands without being caught.

Mrs. Lesueur went quietly away after that, for although she was still in doubt whether Elise had really understood the main gist of her words, she wished to leave the child's wits to find the concrete application of them. Besides, strange as it may seem in a woman so fundamentally unscrupulous, Mrs. Lesueur really felt that it would be brushing the bloom off a peach to mention actual names to her daughter.

But Elise understood very well; her own power was, in fact, the only thing of all the manifold mysteries under the sun that she really understood. This sense had always been instinctive in her, but to-night it had attained to the vivid reality of a thing that has once been expressed in definite words.

Simple as was Michael's position in relation to the world, the Strode family had always represented to the Lesueurs that paradise of good society which is so mysteriously attractive to everybody but vagabonds or geniuses. And Elise was still childish enough to remember the time when

Cecily Strode had piped out a plain fact: "We are not quite the same as you, you see, though, of course, it's quite right for us to be kind to you."

"Cecily Strode, in her badly-hung home-made skirt, too!" said Elise to herself, as she lay dreaming of cheese in a baited trap; in other words, of smoked-grey frocks and long sweeping lines. Sublimely ignorant of the fact that Michael, at present, cared more for the tap of a hammer and the drift of his own thought than for all the cunning curves in a woman's beauty, Elise lay and plotted.

Outside her altogether was the very barest glimmer of comprehension of that man's world where his thoughts lived, of that world all round her where the hum of labour sounds. As empty of everything save instinct as a sparrow, she peopled her world with dreams of what was to be, while on both sides of the sea all Europe lay armed to the teeth, living in a powder magazine with a match-box in every journalist's hand, waiting incessantly for a racial war, harassed incessantly by the infinitely worse possibilities of a class-war. In the whole of man's world, war latent or overt, everywhere, even in those so-called haunts of quietness, the laboratories and studies; war of atoms and spirits, of creeds and philosophies; of Buddha and Christ; of Christ and Nietsche; of the philosophy of the superman against the creed of human solidarity; of Paradise and Nirvana.

And into the darkness of it all peered Michael trying to find a foothold and a justification for his existence.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WIND IN THE ASPENS

"THAT'S a pretty peach and no mistake, a proper high-stepping piece of goods, with a wicked little eye of her own, too," said John Pym, standing pipe in mouth in his doorway, as Elise Lesueur appeared at the end of Monmouth Street.

"There, get along in with 'ee, do," said his wife, "and don't stand there yapping like a fule about the eyes o' proud faymales. She ought to take shame to herself, that she did, to be strutting about like a pouter pigeon with his legs broke, in thic high-waisted dress, when other folks that's real ladies wears their waist in the place that Nature meant, and that's their middles. My dearest days, 'tis a proper Merry Andrew in a stuff all flowered like my old chiney teapot and with streamers to her hat. Come in, John, this minute."

"'Tis all snug and vitty, Martha, though, and you can't deny it," he grumbled, reluctantly following his wife into the house. "As pretty as a pictur, the little dear."

"Tidn't the cut of the jib that comes to any good, not that piece of goods. And you mark my words. But the mother's a queer one, too, that looks as if she'd bitten off the end of a ten-penny nail and found the pieces lie heavy."

Then the figure they had been discussing appeared in the open doorway.

"Good evening, Mrs. Pym," said Elise, nervously pulling the pale pink ribbons that tied on her garlanded hat, "may I come in?"

"Why, I never did," said Mrs. Pym, mendaciously giving the idea that she now cast eyes on her visitor for the first time, "'tis little Elise Lesueur, and growed out of all knowledge, too. Come in, then, and let's hear how the world's been serving you."

It was a gratification to address this gorgeous but maidenly Queen of Sheba as an old acquaintance, for the Lesueurs were still regarded as foreigners.

"Looking up fine, you be, too," she continued, while John beamed in the background.

"Oh, I'm fairly well," dimpled Elise, with a half sentimental air of languishment, "you don't know how nice it is to see all you dear people again. It is so delightful to come back to the simple old ways. I always feel that I've really come home, when I get out of the station here."

"Ay, that's so," said John, trying the sympathetic stop. "'Tis like that with me when I've got a pint o' beer before me."

"Oh dear, Mr. Pym," giggled Elsie, "but I should soon want somebody to take me home after a pint of beer. 'Twould be the death of poor little me, you know."

"Not it. Do 'ee a world of good, after all the muck you'll have been swallowing in foreign parts."

"Yes, I'm half a French girl now, and I suppose the good *vin ordinaire* would be to you what you so picturesquely call muck. But I must get out of my froggy French ways now in dear old Upham, so marine, so pitchy and tarry," she laughed.

"But I suppose us shan't have you here long," said Mrs. Pym, "for you'll come in handy to turn to and help your mamma. She's a regular driver by what I hear tell."

"Little prinked out crow," thought Mrs. Pym to herself. "That'll take her down a peg or two. I know her beastly patronising ways, just like a district lady on the affable lay."

But Elise bounded elastic from the attack.

"Business, *ma foi*, I know nothing about that. I just—what you call it?—I *papillonne*, like a butterfly from flower to flower. I never can get right through a piece of music, without getting up to sing. La! la! la!" she trilled, getting up to inspect the dusty geraniums and cactus-plants in the window. "Charming flowers you have," she cried, "so tropic, so Eastern, the whole thing. I always think the little cobbled courts of Upham with the tubs of plants set about in them and the background of black roofs against the azure are quite Italian."

Mrs. Pym had no notion of azure, but she felt sure it was something she hated thoroughly.

"Dear place, I love it," purred Elise, "and such interesting people, too. I hear that my old playfellow Michael has become quite an eccentric and is actually learning Mr. Pym's trade. Not but what it must be charming to learn of him. I quite envy Michael, so romantic, just like Handel."

She turned her eyes and smiled on the enchanted John.

"So *that's* what her come for, is it?" said Mrs. Pym internally, "to pump us about him. The deceitful hussy. Her always was an artful little toad years ago, going about telling lies to get other maidens into trouble."

"*On dit*," continued Elise placidly, "that dear old Michael is turning out a regular Nihilist and threatening to blow up society. There are many such in Paris, you know," she said, with a far-away glance as though a vision had been vouchsafed her of the deep-laid plots of international anarchism. As a matter of fact, of course, she had never wittingly set eyes on anything more anarchical than a red tie beneath an unshaven chin. "They do not seem so strange to us as they would, of course, to dear simple people like you."

"Simple or no, Elise Lesueur," said Mrs. Pym, "we'm deeper than we look. And with chits that we've put across our knees and smacked for stealing, we'm not so easy took in. And as for Mr. Strode, he's too much of an Englishman to have any truck with such fandoodles as blowing folks up."

"The most he doos," said John, feebly attempting to follow the conversation, "is to blow up my bellows."

"But, dear Mrs. Pym," said Elise, paying no attention to the oar he put in, "he is a gentleman, after all, and they say he works just like a working man now. It is so queer that really *la tête me tourne*. Oh, *pardon*, it causes the head to whirl. Doesn't he ever come in of an evening to see you? And won't you ask me in to meet him? I know I could worm all his secrets out of him."

"There ain't no flies on Michael," said Pym enthusiastically. "He's got the making of a proper fine workman and a capital hand, too, at pen and ink slinging. And there he goes," he concluded, giving three whistling notes as Michael hove in sight. Elise got up and went to the door.

"You fule-head," whispered Mrs. Pym to John; "you pesky, tarnation blockhead, whatever did you call 'en in for? I seed 'en coming down the street, but I wouldn't ha' said so. And now you've done it."

Elise ran up to Michael and putting her hand on his arm drew him towards the brighter light from the window, for the evening was gathering in.

"Who is it?" she asked. "Someone you used to know ages ago. Have a good look, then you'll know." Then shaking his hand up and down she cried: "Oh, what a big man you've grown! And the last time we met was at the funeral of the old tabby cat. Don't you remember how your sister cried into the pinks we planted on his grave? But I didn't cry, for I always said that crying never mended anything."

"Why," cried Michael, "I see now. It's Elise Lesueur, but I should never have known you."

"Yes," she said gaily, "I was a scraggy, lean little thing then."

Chameleon-like she reflected the temperament that was more immediately near hers at the moment and with Michael she was far simpler and more sincere than even with Aviolet.

"Why," said Michael, watching the dainty Dresden china figure, "it was only the other day that I came upon old Tibby's tombstone at the back of the garden. The words on it are all rubbed out, but I remember them still: 'Sacred to the memory of a beloved old friend.' We made it up together, I remember. Tibby's grandson still lives at Snug Harbour now. You must come round and see him and Cis and mother."

"Very kind of you, Michael. But what a memory you have."

He chiefly recalled Elise as a leggy, little, pert-tongued minx, who was quicker with her brains than any other child of the place. She never cried when the fish wriggled, but plucked them off the rod as neatly as a boy.

"Whatever made 'ee so hard on that maid?" said John, as the two left the house together. "I'm sure for all her do talk up with a clip of the tongue, 'tis a niceish little piece of all right and with no more vice than any skittish colt. Tell

'ee what 'tis, Martha, you'm a bit liverish. I should take a pill to-night if I was you. My word, don't her look up pretty into a man's face," he maundered on, getting up to watch the tall figure and the short walk down the street. "Ah, well," he sighed, dropping his fat person into the arm-chair and folding his hands, with plump interlocked fingers, across his portly bow-window, "I wish I was young and sparkish again, there's naught like it, naught."

In the firelight the bald pinky top of his head with its thin grey down reminded one forcibly of the skin of a healthy porker.

"By good rights, John," said Mrs. Pym, eyeing him with strong disapproval, "you ought to ha' been reared on a desert island, where the hussies couldn't get to 'ee."

"Ah, my dear, they don't wink the eye to me nowadays. My day's past, worse luck. So you needn't ship me off to Californy yet awhiles," he added, his geography failing him. "Yours I be, and yours I shall be, true d'le death," he murmured sleepily, with a vague reminiscence of the marriage service.

Elise and Michael walked away, each vaguely trying to guess the contents of the other's mind, in the way people grope after impressions in a foreign country seen for the first time. Elise was by no means a bad chum in the old days, Michael reflected, as they walked up the valley past the red sandstone cliffs that still show the hollows made by the wave-work of by-gone centuries.

"Michael," said she at last, "why are you so strange? Tell me?"

"Strange? Am I? I don't think I'm really as strange as I look. If I'd been born fifty years ago I suppose I should have gone sheep-shearing, or cattle-ranching. But nowadays if a chap wants to strike out a new line, he needn't leave the old country. He can plough a new furrow here quite as well as in New Zealand—and probably better. I know man after man who's just let out in his own way—into slums, settlements, or even gaols."

"But what for?" said Elise, puckering her brow. "Adventure, change, fun?"

"Oh, partly. But it's so difficult to explain."

Elise smiled knowingly, with the raising of her upper lip

that seemed so sincere. "He'll soon settle down," she thought.

To her the world was a place full of pleasant things of which one instinctively annexed just as many as possible. Unfortunately, however, she had almost as narrow a range of taste in pleasant things as any *pithecarpus erectus* in his Javan forest, though certainly in the matter of clothes she scored off him. However, she was convinced that sooner or later, everyone in this world would come round to her way of thinking.

"But you're not going to stay on with Pym, are you?" she asked.

"Oh, by no means. I only want to get licked into shape there. Afterwards I'm going into the thick of things, to learn what it's like to be an unnoted cog in a huge machine and to be valued for your muscle only, to be a 'hand,' in short. That's something we 'gentlemen' go all our lives without knowing and when we try to clear up this almighty muddle, it's to that ignorance we owe half our mistakes."

"'Tisn't a bad world at all," protested Elise.

"Not for a few thousands. But what about the millions?"

"I don't know and I don't want to. I'm not going to be one of the millions, that's all I care for."

"Well, I am for a time."

"And then?"

"I'm going to alter some of it for some of the millions, anyhow."

He spoke, head erect, with gallant confidence that the one almighty thing in the world is a good will.

"But you can't, Michaël. I call it just silly to talk like that."

"It would be, if I were alone."

"What *do* you mean?"

"Why, that there are thousands everywhere, though I don't yet know a score of them, who feel as I do, that the time's come when we've got to tackle the question of a fair share of the good things of life. You find 'em everywhere now, men who feel like that, from the Cabinet to the carpenter's bench. Oh, I grant you there are millions who don't, but what do *they* matter? We'll hatch the world over again.

by God we will, and hatch it different. And the first thing to do is to see things as they are. We're only now beginning to do that. I'm sitting on my own private egg," he laughed, "my own little egg that I mean to get hatched in the monstrous big hatching there's going to be presently. You've no idea," he continued, bringing out a pocket-book stuffed with papers, "how things open up when once you begin. Here are letters from men I knew at college all on different points in the same question and here are three from working men. Somehow, you know, one just starts thinking and along after you come other people thinking the same. There's a sort of magnetism about it. I like all the bustle of it, too."

"So do I," said Elise, "I love the days when things happen, when you get a wire about your frock and a pile of patterns and parcels. I love things when they hum and especially when you've made them hum yourself."

"So do I," said Michael.

She stretched out her fingers and he held them gently, in a passion of reverence, not for Elise, but for the fighting zest of things.

At that moment, rising and falling on the wind, came the wheezy notes of an old barrel-organ playing over the meadows at Countess Weir. One of the swans on the river gave the curious barking cough with which these birds are in the habit of expressing their feelings. Then came another sound.

"Michael," whispered the girl, lifting her face to him, "listen to those trees."

Though the night was still, a clump of aspens quivered as though under the fall of millions of water-drops. In their rustle while all the woods were still there was something awe-inspiring, as though they alone were aware of some unknown force at hand for good or ill. Elise, who sought the cellar in a thunderstorm, drew so close to Michael that she could hear his breathing.

Then the aspens grew as suddenly quiet as before they had been garrulous and in louder pants came another tune from the distant organ.

"Why," exclaimed Elise, "it's the old *Blue Danube* waltz. Come, there's nobody to see us."

She held up her arms and to the amazement of the swans, the two humans began to waltz in ever wider and wider circles across the smooth grass. Whistling as clearly as a blackbird, Elise quickened their pace till the aspens, if they shivered again, were unheeded and the swans paddling silently nearer, swam up to watch, under the long shadows of the hawthorn trees.

"Oh," cried Elise, "how good, how good!"

The movement of the dance, by rousing the blood in their veins, quickened their natures into near kinship.

"Elise," said Michael impulsively, "I wish you could understand how I think about things. You've no idea how wonderful it is to feel yourself a part—and a part that matters—of the larger life. When the barriers go down, so that you can see no difference between your purposes for other men and your purposes for yourself, it feels like the rush of a mighty wind. I can't express it. It can't be expressed. It can only be felt. Elise, can't you feel it, too?"

Raising herself on tip-toe, she strained her little mind by the altitude of a chopine.

"You mean one mustn't be selfish. But I can't help it, Michael. If you don't fight to get things for yourself, you'll never have them. I *do* want things so, too."

"I want things, I want things awfully, Elise."

His voice trembled.

"Tell me what?" she asked softly.

"A foothold, a chance. I want to get out—that I may do something worth doing."

Dim, inchoate longings floated from his heart to hers, as wistfully, like a small dog before his master's big sorrow, she tried to fathom the cause of the pain that he was evidently suffering.

"I wish I could help," she said humbly. Then, slipping her hand into his, she whispered: "You must talk to me, you must teach me. Nobody ever told me anything about it."

In the childish expression of her woman's heart there was to Michael more sweetness than he had ever derived from the sympathy of the men whose conceptions leapt with his. For, dislike it as women may, there is spiritual truth in the

saying: "He for God only, she for God in him." Only the bother is that "he" is so very far from divine.

Together they walked back to the village with youth weaving veils between themselves and the future, misty veils, iridescent with the gold and purple of fancy's weaving. For wherever they go some women naturally raise the pulse of life to quicker beating, till the paths they trace with their footsteps are marked by a vivider life, like the bright green circles where the fairies tread.

Later on that evening Elise sat at supper at her aunt's, leaning over the table with her chin pillowed in the palm of one hand, while the other held a strawberry from which she delicately bit piece after piece.

"Mother," she said suddenly, when her aunt had left the room, "I want you to take me back to town with you on Monday. I can't stay here."

"Why?" said Mrs. Lesueur curtly.

"Because I've changed my mind . . . since I've met Michael Strode. I want to go."

"You never had much to speak of in the way of brain, Elise, but you ought to have enough to see that there are things you can't understand."

"There's one thing I can understand very well and I won't go on with it. He's bigger than I thought and things look different when you get close to them. Besides, he's no longer eligible."

Mrs. Lesueur sat still, deep in thought. She was, in fact, dismayed at the unexpected step taken by Strode.

"Elise," she said, tacking suddenly, "I never asked you to waste your time over Michael. You're here for country air."

"And," stared Elise, with a burst of laughter, "a few days ago you'd have said that too much time couldn't be wasted over him. Besides, he's a real good old sort."

"A real good old sort!" echoed Mrs. Lesueur, "that's the kind of thing I will *not* allow. I spend money to get you properly educated and now you come back here and talk as commonly as any work-girl. Why, the first day or two, one could hear you were French convent bred and quite aristocratic it sounded to hear you talk, and now you go on just like Hetty Osborne. Mind, I won't have you *speak* to these girls."

"*Mais non*, I can do the patter style still, to *cher* M'sieur Aviolet, *par example*. But *chez moi*, of course, I relax," she retorted impudently with outspread fingers.

"You will please not to relax here or anywhere. It's been enough trouble to pull you up out of the gutter, I can assure you."

"*Ma bonne mère*, it is that you are shrewish to-day. But it is all the big Michael's fault and I excuse it in you." Then, suddenly changing her tone, she cried: "It's hateful, all this miserable plotting. I won't have it. I won't do it, not with him anyway. Take me back with you and let's end it, mother; can't you see how mean it all is?"

Mrs. Lesueur watched her in amazement. Then she smiled to herself; things would be easier than she had supposed. Rapidly she reckoned up the trump card now in her hand—Elise in love with a man whom Mrs. Lesueur knew to be a better gentleman than any she would be likely to meet in town. For, of course, Michael's highfalutin ways would soon change into acquiescence in his uncle's plans for him. Still, she felt vindictive towards her rebellious daughter.

"I wish," she said tartly, "that you had something more than an outside to your head."

But the sudden spurt of revolt had died out in the girl, who being in those days a lute on which many hands struck varying notes, obeyed her mother's touch most instinctively. Yet Michael's talk was still a bewildering memory to her.

"He told me such a queer story," she said dreamily.

"Once, in the days when St. Peter got to Heaven, he was troubled because his old mother was yet in Hell. Being, the dear man, distressed at this, he got *le bon Dieu* to let him reach down and lift her up. But so it was that when the other folks in Hell saw her going up, they wanted to get out too, so they caught hold of her, a whole string of them, and rose as she rose. And she got up quite quickly while they clung to her, but she didn't want them and pushed them off one after the other, till at last there was but one poor lost ghost clinging to her. And all the time she had been rising more and more slowly as they fell off, till when the last one went plump, she fell back into Hell, too. That's

the way Michael feels, he says, about people he s never seen, hundreds of them. Queer, isn't it?"

"Well," said Mrs. Lesueur grimly, "there's one thing certain, that if he's really going to rise, he'll have one person to carry up with him. Canst guess, *petite*, who that is?"

But Elise was silent.

By this time, as Michael strolled up the valley again, the swans were roosting, and the cheerful evening twitter of the birds, like housewives gossipping in a friendly street, had ceased in the woods. Only the aspens were quivering again, as though in a fierce current of wind: the incessant rattle of the leaves overhead through the utter stillness was like the marching of an advancing host. Then for a moment there would be silence, till the aerial army began again.

In the sound of it there came back to Michael the peace and elation of a spirit that knows itself bathed in a sea of power which, greater than itself and indeed vast as the universe, is yet part of it. For on the wings of the wind that stirred the aspens there sounded the coming of the Time Spirit, telling out the vision of the future that it was to make, with Michael and his fellows as its agent. It has always sounded, that going in the top of the mulberry trees; it will sound still, when big Michael's bones are dust, for it is much more than the spirit of the time: it is the spirit of the ages and to-day it sings brotherhood, solidarity, co-operation of man with man. To-morrow its tune may be different, as different as were the notes of its going yesterday.

So Michael listened, while the tremours of the blood quieted and the idle thoughts faded, till only the sense of power remained, a power that was supremely strong, because world-wide. Fingers reaching from the darkness were moulding him as they shape all men and he knew it.

Ere the buckling on of knightly armour, the mediaeval youth was left to his vigil in some shrine apart; now to Michael, all the earth being a shrine, he worshipped in the grove. The sound of trees became a sign to him, and in the days when temptation, opposition, and calumny were his lot, his harassed brain used to wait instinctively for the old quiver of the aspen trees, till the wind among the tree-tops ended by becoming to him a symbol as helpful as any that religion has ever consecrated.

CHAPTER IX

THE WIDER VISION

THUNDEROUS with the roar of the blast furnace the quadrangular buildings of the Phoenix Works lay in front of Michael. Against the clear lilac of the sky rose a tremulous column of vapour that cast shifting lights over the pools in the black sand of the open courtyard and gleamed across the piles of iron waste that, sucked and drained of the virtue that once filled their veins, lay in shapeless masses at the foot of the fire that had melted the heart out of them. It was the scrap-heap of the foundry.

At the door of the office, Durant met Michael, who noticed that the very wall of the orchard on the other side of the lane had been mended in places with fragments of old iron.

"The governor will be glad to see you, sir," said Durant. He opened the private door of the proprietor's office and discreetly murmuring, "Mr. Strode, sir," ushered Michael into the room. The elegant air of retired leisure that reigned like a presiding presence over the heavy oak office fittings made a curious contrast to the unkempt wildness of the actual Works, of which this room was the business centre.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Strode," said Joseph Clatworthy, rising from the great desk at which he sat in the middle of the room, "I knew your uncle well and am delighted to make your acquaintance. De-lighted! Your uncle *is* Mr. William Costelow, I believe?"

Reassured on this point, he swept Michael, as it were, into the fatherly embrace of his large soft hand and firmly inducted him into a chair.

Mr. Clatworthy's method of starting a conversation was peculiar; like an author bereft of inspiration, but driven by the devil of need, he always started by pouring out an

avalanche of flummery, to get his hand in, as it were, before coming to close quarters. He began this time on Socialism.

"No," said Michael curtly, "I'm no Socialist. I don't believe in it at all. This is the time for social experiment only and that's work for private individuals. You simply can't experiment with a nation. That's altogether too big a scale. No, the private owner must experiment and if his work is successful, then the State follows."

Mr. Clatworthy had never in his life dreamt of experimenting in any department. None the less, he acquiesced complacently.

"My idea exactly," purred he. "Never heard a point put more neatly in my life. Never."

The flowing lines of his ample figure, the Beau Brummel air of polite leisure that brooded over his polished skull and rosy cheeks seemed to smooth the rough ways of earth from one's consciousness, and to sun oneself in his cheerful presence was to sit in a walled garden of peace over which not even the Congo horrors could leap.

"My life has always been so pre-occupied with—may I put it so, Mr. Strode—turning the handle of the industrial barrel-organ—that I've had no time to work out these principles, these edifying principles that do you so much credit."

Michael was made to feel that it would be doing Mr. Clatworthy a real service were he to work them out on behalf of a thinker overtaxed by the claims of the actual.

"What I want," said he, leaping at the opportunity, "is to get some firm to take me on as a hand, so that I may get practical knowledge all round."

"Well," smiled Joseph, "we might apprentice you and, for all your brain, you'd be less use to us than a navvy. But how do I know that if I took you on, you wouldn't be spreading discontent right and left? For I suspect you're a firebrand."

He shook a forefinger playfully in front of him.

"Take me on, Mr. Clatworthy, and try me. You can kick me out if there are any complaints from your foreman about me. I pledge you my word that I'll never incite to any trouble or dispute."

"That's an undertaking, Mr. Strode, that wouldn't blind a business man for a moment. But I've no fears at all. There isn't a foundry in the West of England where there's less trouble than at the Phoenix. If I took you on, I should merely look on you as a permanent inspector."

There had been a few difficulties with Trade Union secretaries, and Mr. Clatworthy had reason to expect a great many more in the near future. But, of course, he never regarded Michael's proposal in any light but as the mere prank of a foolish youth.

"I'll think it over and let you know," said he rising. "You see, we're peculiarly situated here. If we did business, say in Cardiff or the North, we should have a floating reserve of labour from which to choose, but down here, if we dismiss skilled men, we can't replace 'em except by bringing new ones from the iron centres. Hampered every way, we are, by distance from our coal, our iron, and our men. Why, our best moulders come from Birmingham and the finest sand from the old Birmingham cemetery."

Here, thought Michael, if anywhere, one could get down to the bare bones of things; that was his present purpose.

"Get," said he, "a monopoly of some manufacture for a few years ahead of the rest of England and that would give you a big enough capital to launch out in all directions —and hold your own."

Mr. Clatworthy nodded slowly; this time Michael had actually struck on a favourite idea of his, only as yet he had not found the monopoly.

Joseph Clatworthy was a man of principle, of a curious point-device principle that permeated his whole mind like the lean layers in streaky bacon. Cut him open anywhere, he was wont to say, and you would find him all of a piece.

The fate that presides over birth had started him as the son of a grocer; with feminine perversity she had also decreed that this grocery business should be especially prosperous in the department of tinned meats, that Joseph should be an only son and that he should attend a lecture given by a speaker sent down by one of the earliest of the Vegetarian Societies.

There was a strong strain of mysticism in Joseph's nature,

as well as a marked deposit of honesty and when he followed up the vegetarian lecture by several spiritualistic meetings where he rubbed shoulders with clairvoyants, he became aware of a discrepancy between his beliefs and the way in which he earned a living. For to Joseph a slaughter-house had become, not merely a place where beasts go in and meat comes out, but a spot where the place is full of a psychic *aura* of fear and pain, an atmosphere that is like a deadly blight poisoning all our towns.

Joseph's honesty and psychic faith encountered the meat trade in his father's shop; there was a sharp collision between his own desire for an easy berth and his principles—and—Joseph went, to make way for a bullet-headed cousin who used hog's fat on his head with ne'er a whisper of conscience. But his father's brother had given him a post in his counting house in the Phoenix Works and of these Works Joseph himself was now owner.

"Now," said he, as he led the way across the yard, "I'm going to leave you to yourself to go over the place. They're casting at this particular minute, so you'll see us at our busiest."

"And you'll think over what I asked you?" said Michael, following between the litter of huge pipes into the casting shed.

"You shall hear from me very shortly. Let's see, Durant has your address, I think. Good day to you, Mr. Strode."

So they parted, while Michael stood in the dark archway that opened on the centre of the foundry.

At first he could see nothing but red-gold lights that flickered up and down like will-o'-the-wisps of the pit, for his nerves were vibrating with the incessant whirr of the power machines, and with the furious energy of the central furnace that towered into the domed roof like an enormous organ pipe, vomiting out a flood of molten metal from its huge cylinder. Far overhead, against the small panes of dusty glass that roofed the foundry, the fumes of sulphurous vapour gathered in heavy clouds that percolated slowly through the interstices of the glass or dimly rolled in smutty tears across its vitreous surface. Rising from the black rough-cast wall in a mingling of gloom and light, the huge amorphous cavern was so vast that it suggested some cave

of burning mists where the winds never blow in the cleansing of their mighty forces.

Michael drew a deep breath with that most certain, most poignant and yet most calm of all sensations—the quite indubitable perception that he had come home and that here, in this rough world where men tear power out of the vitals of the earth, was the work he had been vaguely seeking through all the half fantastic fancies of the last weeks, fancies born, partly of defiance, partly of that morbid perception of evil that comes from over-stimulation of the sympathetic imagination, the prevailing disease of the intellectuals of to-day. Like a man exploring a subterranean passage, he had come upon a submerged river of instinct within his nature. Of late he had been familiarised with the warm sickliness of the factory air, but in this life that seethed and roared there was the fight, the rough wrestling, that he craved for the satisfaction of his instincts.

On him, then, had come the thrill we all experience when at last we find the thing that we were made to do. In this men grow to love, though with a passion that is sometimes akin to hatred, the tools, the insignia, the very chips and shavings of their chosen task, their *métier:* The turn of a phrase, the rough grain of a stone, the feel of a seed grain; in these, to the worker who has found his work, there is the same satisfaction that other men find in the flash of friendly eyes or in the huge playfulness of the sea. And this satisfaction in the work that chooses us is one of the keenest joys that the rough old earth can give us, her last supreme benison, for with it the whole world becomes a home.

Dazed at first by the sensation of being caught in some whirring wheel of change, Michael mounted the blackened steps of a bridge that spanned the central area and led to a gallery in front of which whizzed the lines working the crane that carried feeds of molten stuff down the length of the foundry from the furnace mouth to the moulders, who waited amid thick layers of black sand to fill the frames.

The process of casting is an extraordinarily primitive one; it consists of pouring liquid metal into the cavities of a frame or mould that has been packed with layers of sand. First a deposit of sand is laid in the lower half of the frame, then the pattern is pressed into this, small drains or "geats"

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are dribbled as escape vents, the whole is dusted with finer sand to prevent adhesion and the second part of the frame, also close packed with sand, is laid over the first. The removing of the pattern leaves a cavity into which the molten stuff is poured. The process is the same in the casting of all metals, from gold and silver to lead and iron, a method that takes one back in fancy to the most primitive ways of exploiting the earth-forces, to the shaping of the bow, the chipping of the flint, even to the first stirring of the clods of the soil.

From the long ladle that the men used to pour the metal into the moulds, the glowing mass cast red lights upon those who bore it, as they darted, literal flame-bearers, between the lines of moulds that covered the ground in all directions. Long, meagre figures, haggard in the burning lights that flamed on nose and chin and outspread arms, and blazed in cavernous eye-sockets, they seemed sweated down to bare muscle and bone, yet for all the fiery heat of the place, most of them wore knotted neckcloths and heavy woollen coats, for the contrasts of temperature are enormous and thin clothes are eaten away by the furnace gases.

As the flame-bearers moved, thick showers of red hot sparks, living wheels of fire, rose into the air from the furnace mouth, like lights from a Titan's anvil. Smaller showers darted from the great wheel-moulds on which the men stood, figures bathed in light and flame amid the stench of frizzling sand with which the whole place reeked. Along the truck-lines loaded trolleys pushed by sweating figures jarred and crashed to the accompaniment of rattling cranes, hoarse shouts and the bursting roar of the furnace. The moulders grubbing in the sand seemed automata moved by the will of the fire whose hot waves struck the face like blows and shook the heart as with the weaving of an infernal shuttle.

While the darting figures played with the whirling sparks, Michael lost count of himself, till the flames became circles bearing him out and away into the forces that build the material world, and a hoarse shout from the gallery joined the cries of the men below who, by no means *Gott-betrunken*, were merely getting through the casting hour when men at piece work have to toil hardest. Michael, however,

felt that he was assisting at some ceremony for whose initiation one must go back to the dawn of time, when man first laid his hand on molten metal, a stream of power on which he was to base his civilisation, out of which were to rise the humming factories, the whirring wheels that bear the earth's harvests to the markets of the world.

It is a fine moment in a man's life when, caught up for a second in the onrush of human activity, he senses for the first time his own small share in it. Nowadays, the illuminating moment generally comes in some sudden perception of the unknown worlds where science seeks to lay her pathways; of old it came most often in the guise of a spirit driving men to tell of the dream of divine pity they had dreamt. But to Michael, who was neither saint nor scientist, it came in the simple guise of a recognition of the part metal-working has taken in the history of civilisation. "Iron-master": the word seemed to him nothing less than a potent spell.

Like a lover doting on his mistress's dimples, he thought of the bronze casting whose fire throws up a greener green than absinthe, of the casting in gold and silver, as delicate in its accuracy as the huge iron castings are massive in power. The common material world would never be the same to him again, for she had given him of the fever in her veins.

In the trance that follows exaltation he lost count of time and when he at last roused himself the scene had changed; the furnace fires were dying, the sulphur fumes fading, the grey lights from outside invading the haggard place that, strained and weary, still seemed to vibrate with the conflict of the last hour.

He became aware of the tramp of many feet from outside, the tramp of steady footsteps that beat a monotone of sound into his brain. Not in step like the marching of trained soldiers, for all its suppressed hurry it was rhythmic and balanced, less mechanical but more full of purpose than the exact step-marching of a regiment.

The sound lengthened in Michael's ears till he seemed to be listening to the tramp of labour, to the march of all the vast multitudes that, slipped now over the edge of the world, had borne the dead weight of the earth's tasks. On and on it sounded, the roll-call of labour, more vast in the

chambers of his brain than any pageant in the sunlight. Beneath the wisdom of Egypt it had suffered, behind the shows of Versailles it had mocked, as now, in these days of air-ships and the breaking down of international barriers, it is at last becoming articulate and demanding its full share in the fruits of labour. The tramping hordes began to assume in his mind the mystery of a half-shapeless face that questions every age of its ultimate success or failure in this one task—the bringing of help to the common need of men. Help! The word echoed in Michael's brain like a bell; it was a call for the wisdom, never yet found, that shall not only sweep away old troubles, but establish a life that is based neither on slavery, nor on its shadow, poverty.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clatworthy was speculating on the possibility of Michael's proving of some importance to himself. For desperate need calls for desperate remedies and although Mr. Clatworthy had at present no desperate need, he saw the wisdom of so laying his plans for the future that he might escape it. In all his calculations it was Michael's uncle and his capital, and not Michael himself, that played the larger part. For if the lad had grip the uncle would back him; Billy Costelow was not the man to lose a ship for a ha'p'orth of tar.

Quickly running up the airy fabric of the future, Mr. Clatworthy looked at the facts of his own position. These were not altogether pleasant to contemplate: a business on the down-grade with great need of fresh life in brain, energy and capital; constant labour disputes every year threatening ruin; advancing years and a love of the flute, of chess and gardening in himself.

His lips curled in pleasant reverie as he thought of one quick spurt of revivified business for seven years, perhaps; seven years for Rachel, was it not? Finally, a sale of the Works, cheap, on an agreement of a fixed income to himself to be paid for another seven years.

It was curious that although he reckoned, at least in dream, on Michael's possible brain and problematic control of capital, he at the same time calculated that he would also be blind to the fact that he was being used, in a measure, as a cat's paw.

As a matter of fact the affair never presented itself to

Mr. Clatworthy in that light at all; for although intensely scrupulous even to quixotry, in small matters of principle, he was of a large, vague morality in big ones. He was, in fact, a man who would take a bath twice a day, yet remain placidly oblivious of the fact that the drains of his house were out of order. A Radical was anathema to him, but he would cheerfully play lamb to any Socialist lion, since, to his mind, Radicals use spades, but Socialists only play with banners. He was, indeed, unaware of the fact that the art of siege includes the storming of ramparts no less than the digging of trenches.

The discrepancy was, in fact, intellectual rather than moral, for details always befogged him till he became like a man lost in a forest country who can nowhere attain an eminence high enough to enable him to view the lay of the land. The only remedy, of course, in such a plight, is to climb the highest tree you can find, but Joseph Clatworthy was over old to begin tree-climbing, even had it not been, as it was, strictly against his religious habits to countenance anything like a reversion to the habits of our arboreal ancestors, save, of course, in the matter of nut-eating.

To the Victorian music of "I arise from dreams of thee," trilled on his flute, he therefore laid his plans for Michael's future career. For when the reformer steps into the practical world he not only uses tools, but frequently becomes one for other men's handling. Mr. Clatworthy hated evolution, and counted loyalty to the sovereign an essential of gentility, but he was none the less a man of affairs who was quite aware in what direction the trade winds blow.

CHAPTER X

THE RIDING OF THE FIRE

WHETHER man is a fallen angel or a risen savage, whether the turning point in his career has been a crashing tumble on Mother Earth or a passionate bound upwards from her embrace, he has, at any rate, forgotten the message taught him in that love-clasp. Meanwhile the woman remembers it, and whilst he is groping in the abyss of oblivion, she has found the way to what she wants.

And Elise knew perfectly what she wanted; it was to lift her friendship with Michael out of the plane of cunning intrigue on which her mother had left it when she returned to town. This could only be done by so renewing her acquaintance with the Strode family that she became recognised as a friend, and not as the poor dressmaker's niece. The way to this she found by playing on Aviolet's inability to refuse a woman anything. In a half sleep-walking condition, accordingly, he took her, on the day Michael spent at the Phoenix Works, to the café in Exminster Close where he had arranged to meet Cecily for a meal before they went to the theatre together.

It was not until Aviolet had brought the two girls face to face that he understood what an instinctive dislike of Elise possessed Cecily. Both delicate bosoms, in fact, were tumultuous, one with anger and the other with a nervousness that feigns bravado, as the grey eyes flashed with sheet lightning, the brown with the mocking sunlight that plays across the sky at the edge of the storm-cloud.

For all her delicate build, Cecily belonged to the type that bears the hardness of the world of man or Nature. Tender and sensitive, revolting at first, yet acquiescent in the end, on her is laid the burden of patient endurance, sometimes of monotonous toil and waiting, sometimes of the labour of child-rearing and bearing. She is of the

woman type that submits to the yoke of service, for by the strange paradox of Nature's clumsiness and man's recklessness, it is always to women that the riddle of the earth comes with hardest questioning.

But if woman is this, she is also, what she was in Elise, the being who most absolutely defies any burden-bearing, who in the pride of life most systematically repudiates all toil, sorrow and care. Of all the fruits of man's labour she takes toll, laughing to see the hard-earned wealth flung here and there at her lightest caprice.

The essence of Elise is boldness; she has no need to learn the motto of Danton, *l'audace, l'audace et toujours l'audace,* for that is the fairy gift found in the cradles of such women, since, cunning with them taking the place of brain, they have no sense of the pity of the human lot, no premonition of the swift falling of the shadow that waits on human sunshine. Fate is to them merely a lying harridan, who may be cozened, not an unseen player whose thoughts must be read on penalty of ruin. On such as these the blow falls with a dead thud that has no possibility of rebound in it.

In this brightly lit room, with the background of the city outside, Elise was herself, and no longer, as in a country village, half afraid of Cecily's different social position. With the dimly felt scenic accessories of all the different grades of town society behind her, Elise felt she had come into her own. A laugh bubbled to her lips as she held out her hand to Cecily.

"So glad we meet at last," she said patronisingly. "I thought it was really never coming about. You're so shy, you see. And for this pleasure I have to thank Mr. Aviolet."

She leant across the table with an ease of gesture that Cecily hated, as she became aware of the perfection of Elise's dress, of the curious French hat, with the suggestion of some winged creature alighting for a moment on the waves of auburn hair, of the black bands that outlined the perfection of the curves of the bust and hips. It was, so Cecily thought, a perfectly indecent dress; she actually began to feel her own skirts flap about her ankles in dismal limpness, like those of some trollop of the streets. And the carriage of the head on the shoulders, the tilted chin, the outward

heave of the bosom; through all this there quivered the power of the same tireless will that had forced Aviolet to bring about this introduction.

With an effort, he withdrew his glance from Elise, and bending, spoke to Cecily in a low voice that expressed something of disquietude at the electric storm of which he felt himself the centre.

"What will you have?" he asked, cursing himself for his folly as he noticed the girl's trembling lips.

"Oh, just some fruit, please." She felt a vague desire for coolness and simplicity.

"But you must have something else. This is your dinner, remember. I can't have you giving way to your natural frugivorous instincts, you know. We're not in Eden now."

"Are you," said Elise, "thinking of Eve's little game? But, *ma foi*, how you do love that Eden story, Monsieur Aviolet. I do notice that you are always getting back to it."

"You can't get back much further, can you?" he said, beckoning a waitress. Then, having given his order, he continued:

"You know, if it weren't for the Garden of Eden, I don't believe we should ever have had a paradise at all. It is the paradox-maker's Child's *Guide to Knowledge*, that episode of the tree of knowledge."

Elise had no notion of what a paradox might be, but she responded gallantly enough.

"Oh," she said, "funny talk only means turning your sentences the wrong way round."

"And funny talk," said Cecily, making a plaintive attempt to testify, "might leave sacred things alone, I should think."

"La, la, la," said Elise. "Eden sacred! Well, I don't know. I shouldn't have said so." She made a grimace and picked two cherries off their stalks, childishly making round mouths with her lips.

"Little underbred thing," thought Cecily, turning towards Aviolet so that her left shoulder only was presented to Elise. But the voice pursued her.

"Anyhow, Eden's respectable now, which it wasn't to begin with."

"Respectability, like gravity," said Aviolet, trying to

cover Cecily's silence, "is a veil people use to cover deformities."

"That's naughty talk," said Elise insolently, "and Miss Strode doesn't approve of naughty talk about sacred things."

She emphasised the quotation with mocking intonation. "But there's Michael, the dear old Michael," she exclaimed, annexing him by her tone to the entire exclusion of every relative and friend he possessed in the world.

Then Michael saw them and for Cecily's further misery she caught the glance of mutual understanding between her brother and Elise. However blind they may look outwardly, the two who can glance like that across a crowded room never miss anything of each other's doings. Cecily decided that nothing should induce her to leave Michael and Elise alone together that night.

Yet, later on, when Michael announced his intention of walking home and Elise calmly wondered whether her bronze Louis Quinze shoes would prevent her accompanying him, she found it impossible to baulk their plans. The same sense of powerlessness that had descended on Aviolet earlier in the day came down on Cecily now.

Once outside alone with Aviolet, her anger burst out:

"Oh, how could you?" she cried, walking so fast that he could scarcely keep up with her. "If you had *done* something, we should not have let them go off like this. But I can't go to the theatre now. I couldn't sit out the evening."

Aviolet shrugged his shoulders; it really ought to be unnecessary to tell the youngest girl that the little strategems of the social war are in her hands entirely.

"And I had to sit there dumb while you made hideous jests with her."

"Soft-hearted people," said Aviolet dreamily, "never scintillate with wit, for it's flint, not pumice stone that gives out sparks. You, darling, are soft-hearted."

But he found that the registration of abstract truths is not expedient in the presence of a *femina furens*.

"How dare you?" she flashed out, till several people turned to watch a lovers' quarrel, "you care for Michael, and yet you refused to help me, when you made it seem ridiculous for us to give up going to the theatre."

"So it would have been," said Aviolet quietly, man-like drawing up his portcullis in face of a woman's anger. "Try to look at the thing reasonably," he added fatuously.

"Reasonable, it is you who are unreasonable."

"Let's go up on Northernhay," he said, piloting her across the road.

She jerked her arm away, while a tear tickled the corner of her eye.

"I hate you," she said, "let me go."

"All right; as long as you don't regard me with indifference, I don't mind."

Under the avenue of tall elms on the castle plateau they sat silently watching the evening greyness closing over the hills beyond the town. In the sense of wide spaces open to all the skyey influences, Cecily grew calmer and Aviolet ventured to put his hand over her burning little one.

"Didn't you see what that girl was doing, and don't you care for Michael really?" she asked more quietly.

"Try to look at it like a man, Cecily," he answered, asking the impossible, for the fleeting liaisons, the underground interludes of sex adventure, are to the average man but will-o'-the-wisp flights across a morass that is attractive only because of its hidden depths. He usually comes back, bogged a bit, maybe, but more appreciative than before of the comfort of the solid earth beneath his feet. But to the woman such interludes are trap-doors into the abyss of self-knowledge, doors which she can never close again, save by an extraordinary mental effort, doors, too, which once opened, have a way of opening again.

"My dear Cis," said Aviolet, "a man has just got to meet women like Elise Lesueur. You know perfectly well that she can never affect the Michael we know at all. But there's another Michael under that one—and he's got to learn it. Elise will teach him. She's uncommonly well able to take care of herself, though, and therefore of him. You may set your heart at ease. She'll never hurt herself. Michael has made himself a detrimental. I don't say she doesn't find him attractive, but she only wants to get a few thrills out of him. The whole experience will be nothing more than a liberal education to him. It'll just make a man of him."

She was silent and he saw a withered look on her face that he had never seen there before.

"What is it, Cecily?" he said.

"Were you made a man of like that?" she asked, her lips trembling, "by a woman like that?"

He was silent.

"Were you?" she persisted.

He had come bang up against the "moral idiocy" that had so much distressed Cecily's mother.

"It's all over now," he said miserably, "over long ago."

"Oh," she cried, struck by a sudden fear of losing, not him, but herself. "I don't understand what you say, or what we are talking about. What is it that she will do with him?"

"Well," said Aviolet, grappling the problem delicately, "what's a kiss, or a sigh or two? She's just a girl—I've met scores like it—who set up images of one man after another in their fancies, who bask in the dream of one for a week or two, till another comes and then he's all the world, till number three appears above the horizon."

"Take me home by train, please," she said, rising with a weary sigh, "no, I couldn't go anywhere to-night, not while Michael is being—educated, I think you called it."

"Trust me, darling, there's no harm done. You see women and men are so different. You know your mother would say so too."

"Oh, mother!" she exclaimed bitterly, "mother loves the seamy side; she says that if we eat chicken we ought to be prepared to cut their throats."

"So we ought. And, Cecily, for all we may regret the fact, it's only after we've learnt the hollowness of light loves, that we know the blessing of the other kind. We're made like that, we men. And, you may believe me or not, Cis, but it's true that you wouldn't be half so dear to me were it not for your unlikeness to—the others. Leave Michael alone, love, for he's got the everlasting safeguard of a fairer maid even than you."

"Who is that?"

"His ideal."

And in the first-class carriage on the way home Cecily learnt for the first time how restfully tender to a woman is

the cradling somewhere on a man's broad shoulder, for many kinds of forces are lit by the torch of Eros, from a farthing rushlight to a fire-beacon, as, no doubt, a lava-flood might be used to boil a kettle.

Meanwhile the elms above the canal were clapping their leafy hands over Michael and Elise. Everything now, the glare of the foundry, and the tramping of feet, had narrowed down, for Michael, to the awe of separate life that walked by his side, till the tapping of her heels seemed a melody that crooned through his heart, and the wavering shadows of the trees flickered like his heart-beats.

In the legend of the Volsung Saga, of the riding through the flames to the maiden girt with fire, is enshrined a truth that will be immortal as long as man approaches woman in the old eternal quest. For the first stray steps into love's territory are hedged about with wonder to the man, with the mystery of unlikeness; above all, with the delicate uprising of love's reverence. "Encompassed with so great a dread," is his cry in that new land.

Thus, two flames circling, yet not mingling, they recede and advance, till the riding of the fire comes with the boldness that the woman supplies.

The two turned for a moment at a gate and stood looking back. At the end of the valley lay the purple smear that the smoke of a city draws across the sky; the towers of its churches were still in sunlight, standing out against the glow like the four-square outlines of a city of dream. At the foot of the hill the shadows of warehouses and timber stacks lay across the dark water that heaved with oily drift against the quays.

It was the same scene, the river valley and the flights of gulls, that had been with them both so often. And by its familiarity to Michael the wonder of to-day was made tenfold more beautiful. For half the strangeness of the many-veined heart of life is that we cut it open amid such homeliness of common things.

Then the silence weighed on him and the dread of this small woman became so great that his lips grew dry and his hands trembled. From under her hat-brim Elise looked up and smiled.

"How adorably simple he is," she thought. There was

in her the pleasant thrill of playing a fish and she felt as though a long line were shivering through her fingers.

She laughed aloud at the thought.

"What is it, Elise?" he asked, glad of the break in the silence.

"You," she answered, "so grim, so quiet. La, la, la, I'm afraid of you, so big, oh, so big and strong."

A passing workman received such a radiant smile from her that he turned and gazed open-mouthed till the two had disappeared.

At the stile she paused and, sighing, raised her brown eyes with a weary look of depression.

"Ah," she said, "but you will go away. And soon there will be no you. Over there, in all the work, you will forget Elise."

Reaching out, she did quite boldly what he had longed to do—touched.

Then, laughing like a child, she said, "Look, yours and mine, big brown paw and little claw." Next, he found she had slipped away and a plaintive voice came, as she sat with her back to him on the top rail: "I'm so tired, Michael. Let's rest here a bit!"

He found that by leaning on the barrier his head was on a level with hers. By reaching towards him she could feel the big shadowy figure at the back of her and closing her eyes in the still swaying of the branches overhead, she let the power of his close nearness wrap her round in sheltering folds of tenderness. He was so near that the shuddering breath he drew caught her ear. To Michael it was a precious torture.

At last, leaning back her head till it touched his shoulder, she whispered, "Michael, stoop. I'll show you something."

In the low, unsteady laugh there was a spell of power; his arms closed round her, and he learnt what it was she had wanted to show him.

"So," she whispered, "again, again. Oh, Michael, isn't it lovely to be loved?"

Then, slipping quickly from his arms she cried, "Not yet, not yet."

So the knight had ridden the fire and the fair dread was slain.

Over the sea next morning lay the benediction of the dawn. Jutting points of cliff, making haste to shake off the shrouding mists of night, rose to catch the challenge of the sun. Tossing manes of silver set in a shimmer of living green rose and fell at the edge of the surf with a power half demoniac as they tossed a body to and fro, a body that struggled, breasting one flurry of foam only to meet another beyond. It was Michael, shouting as he fought in a wrestle with the fierceness of the sea, as it tossed him high like spindrift and again let him drop into the deep translucent furrow between each wave. The slow intake of the breath in a moment of pause was bliss, the fierce second when the hands of playful fury held him up like wreckage, a terror, till in the madness of the battle, he shouted, while gradually the cliffs drew clearer, the shadows faded from their seamed sides and they fronted in serried rows the splendour of the dawn.

Michael was, for the moment, outside himself; he was just man in the face of the earth that bears him, cradles him—and breaks him. In the kiss of the foam snakes, the thunder of the furnace reverberated; in the soft upholding of the green trough, he felt Elise's touch.

CHAPTER XI

A GAMBLE IN FUTURES

"WAKE up, Michael," said Aviolet, flinging a book at the long body that lay burrowing in the tall grass. "I've got my plot. And Lord! to think of the drama in that plot! And the people, people you can walk round, my son! Glory be!" he chortled, flinging his cap in the air. "And, Heaven bless you, when the damned publisher's stumped up, you'll have me for a brother-in-law. You did guess, didn't you?" he asked slowly.

"Well," chuckled Michael, "if a chap goes about with what the novelists call the love-light shining indecently all over him, most people can see it. Luck, old man."

He reached out a hand to Aviolet across the undergrowth of purple veitch.

It was Sunday morning and from where they lay they could see Powderham Belvedere covered with the dingy smoke-mist that comes with the east wind. Here and there, through the veil that covered the landscape, long shafts of light pierced to the out-standing hill-tops. Over all lay the peculiar calm of a wide scene deriving its life from above.

"I feel possessed," said Aviolet, "for I'm working, and when you haven't done a stroke of work that matters for years, it's better than beer and skittles, is work."

"Yet," said Michael, removing a grass blade from his mouth, "yesterday you told me that thought was nothing but an unhealthy secretion. And here you are raving about nothing, but because you can think."

"Think! when a novelist thinks, he's lost. What he's got to do is to see. That's quite another pair of boots. And thought *is* unhealthy. It's a symptom of a deep-seated disease, which the artist must avoid as carefully as he would respectability. And he mustn't think, because

if he does he'll go blind. Thought's like cataract—it shuts out the vision slowly."

"It's very pleasant, anyhow," said Michael reflectively, beginning to speak of his own speculations. He talked particularly of the man who had evidently been the chief influence in his mind, the inspired commercial traveller, Fourier, who planned out the phalansteries where in bands of two thousand workers the millennium was to come to the birth.

"But surely," said Aviolet, "you don't believe in such folly as the phalansteries? Why, every experiment tried on that model has been a dead failure. Fancy imagining that men would endure such bondage, even to put an end to poverty and misery. Besides, even if it were possible, what he thought would take years to do will take centuries."

"Well, then, like the writer of Genesis, you must let days stand for ages, that's all."

"But you don't believe in phalansteries?" persisted Aviolet.

"I believe that every factory will have to become self-contained, self-supporting, and responsible for all the life it gathers round it. It's the neglect of that principle that piles up the human scrap-heap of cast-off workers. In some ways, the phalanstery *is* the unit of industrial life, after all."

"Then what becomes of the Iron Law of Wages? How are you going to deal with the fact that the wages of labour depend on population primarily?"

"Give Labour her just share and there will be no such trouble. Remember, she's never had it yet."

"Then you only drive population up to such an extent that the old conditions begin again."

"I don't believe it. It isn't true, and I hope we shall prove that it isn't before long. Remember, Aviolet, that out of the three factors in production, Labour, Capital, and Talent, Capital has always got the lion's share of the wealth produced, Talent has scrambled for what it could get, and Labour has only got just as much as will keep it in existence at all. All that has to be altered and the co-partnership of Labour, Capital, and Talent has to begin in one private manu-

factory after another. Started first of all by individual capitalists, it will stretch out till the system covers the entire country."

"So that's your dream, is it?"

"A dream I hope to see come true before I die," said Michael, viewing in his mind's eye the ashen face of Cradley Heath, the furnace fires of the Black Country and the mean streets whence are fed such monstrous wens of industry.

"Then you'll have to alter human nature," said Aviolet after a pause.

"It is always altering."

"There we part company and end in a blind alley. That's the *cul-de-sac* of all argument—the 'alter' or 'not alter' principle. But even if you get it established that Capital is to take four per cent only and Labour the trade union wage and Talent only in proportion to its rarity, what about profits? And, worse still, what about losses? There's the crux of your difficulty. Capital's taken both profit and loss up till now."

"Co-partnership means a sharing in profits in proportion to capital held, to wages paid, to talent expended. Losses to be, of course, shared in the same proportion."

"That, 'of course,' is masterly," said Aviolet, "but who's to be the god from the machine to set the system going, to bear up against the incessant jealousies of either party, to settle the demands of all on the common purse?"

"I shall in one corner of the world, some day," said Michael quietly, "and hundreds of others will in their corners. For to do it you've only to set up another industrial ideal. You've forgotten one thing, Aviolet—that a man can always do what he thinks he can do. It's been done, once, twice, three times; it'll be done again and again, till the old ideal's dead and the new one's born."

Through the afternoon of the hot summer day Michael sat over his books, till at last Cecily, going up to call him to tea, noiselessly opened the door of his room and looking in, found him as she had half expected, lying right across his book-littered table, with outstretched arms on which he had pillowed his head. Tip-toeing across the room, she stood for a moment looking down on him. Under his left

arm was a page of foolscap with a few lines written on it in his steady, heavy writing. She read them:

"The leaders of society of old were priests and kings; in future the leaders will be the abstract thinkers and the temporal captains of industry——"

So that was his dream of the future—a captain of industry; it was the first time Cecily had ever realised how man builds new worlds in his brain. Turning quickly, her glance rested on a twisted sheet of paper on the dark carpet. Mechanically picking it up, she spread it out in her hand and glanced down at it. She stood staring at it, till the words written on it had stamped themselves on her brain.

Back again in her room, she sat down on the side of the bed, mechanically pleating and unpleating the long lace scarf she wore. From that height to these depths! In the upheaval of pity, anger, and resentment she got up to go back and search for Elise's letter, to see if the words she had read were actually there. But that was needless: over and over again, like the turning of a mill, the sense conveyed itself to her brain: in half an hour's time, Elise would be waiting for her lover in the wood, at the clearing where Michael and Cecily had played at Red Indians hundreds of times.

"Hundreds of times," she said to herself, as if it mattered. Then, in the half madness of jealousy, she hurried out of the room and downstairs, meeting Aviolet at the house door.

He exclaimed at the sight of her face.

"It's Michael," she cried, waiting for no questions. "I found a letter from that girl to him. But he's asleep and I shall go and find her instead."

"A pity you read the letter," commented Aviolet, as he hurried to keep up with her quick footsteps.

"There I differ from you. He's a boy and I'm older than he. Besides, I've always looked after Michael. If mother were at home, she'd go."

"That's a different matter," said Louis, much wrought upon, but reckoning that the storm of anger would soon wear itself out.

"They have been meeting unknown to everybody for weeks."

"So I supposed."

"Oh, I think you are mean beyond all telling. Such shameless words she wrote!"

"Oh, come now, Cis, don't be such a spitfire. After all, the girl has *some* rights. And what possible good can you do by going in this temper and making a scene?" he said, trying to stop her vehement rush of hurrying words. "You simply shan't go."

"I will."

"You can't."

"Then will you?"

He laughed, half contemptuously as she fancied. "You don't understand. It's simply absurd, going on like this. Of course I shan't interfere. Certainly not. I shouldn't think of such a thing."

"Then, Louis," she said, drawing herself up as she stood still in the middle of the road, "am I to understand that you refuse to help me to prevent Michael ruining himself?"

"It's not a question of ruining. And if it were, such folly as this would only precipitate matters."

In the shadow of the thick woods that bordered the high road they stood eyeing each other.

"Then I'm to understand that you refuse to help me?"

"Absolutely," he said angrily.

"Please take this, Louis," and slipping the ring he had given her from her finger, she held it out to him.

"It'll never be the same again. Nothing ever will," she said brokenly.

"Cecily, you don't know what you're doing. You're simply beside yourself. Come, dear, come out with me quietly, and forget all this. I'm sorry if I've been unkind. I didn't mean to be."

"You don't care," she said in a low voice, "to prevent—Michael becoming like you."

Aviolet stared at her for a moment, then, as the sense of her words reached his brain, he held out his hand and denying his perception of his own childish anger, took the ring from her. His lips were white with rage.

"All right," he said quietly, "I'll say good-bye to you, Cecily."

After all, it was with dazed surprise that she watched him

turn and walk down the road, for a woman's "Go" to a man so often means "Stay" and when he, poor blind simpleton, takes her at her word, she feels that the end of all things has come. But Louis never looked back, and blind with her tears, Cecily turned aside into the wood. As she faced the moss-grown path between the trees, she lifted her head that the wind might blow on her face, for the nerves were aching in every inch of it. On the wind came the bells for evening service; so they rang, only more joyfully, for a wedding. So, one day, they were to have rung for herself and Louis. Often of late, with a transparent veil of awe between herself and thought, she had wondered what the mystery of bridal might be. How would she be able to bear the wonderful dawn of her new life? There was always moonlight in that dream of Cecily's, moonlight and a great silence.

Now she only heard the ringing of angry words in her ears; there would never be any silence or loneliness in her dreams again, for over all lay the shadow of women like Elise. The darkness under the waving tree-roof seemed ominous, and everything that broke under her foot sent pulses of fear shivering through her nerves. At last, as the light from the clearing smote across her eye-balls, Cecily saw that she had come too late. For a moment the misty reaches of blue and the green of the bracken wavered before her eyes till she thought she was going to faint. Then her sight cleared, and she saw Michael and Elise together.

Yet, was it Michael? At any rate it was a Michael she had never seen before, so transformed was he by the adoring worship, the desire that was half fear that flashed in his eyes as he held Elise's with his own, while she bent down to him from the log on which she sat. Years after, when the graving tools of care had done their work on her brother's face, Cecily could find it in her heart to pardon Elise many things, for the sake of the good moment that she had given Michael—once at any rate.

Ashamed of being there, Cecily turned to go, but in the haste of her movements, she made a sound, and the two looked up suddenly across the clearing to where she stood.

Michael stared stupidly, but Elise's lip curled in contempt, for she understood what the girl's presence meant.

Then, as Michael jumped to his feet, and Cecily came out into the open she laughed mockingly.

"Cecily," cried Michael, "what in the world are you doing here?"

"I found the letter," stammered she, feeling all the guilt that Elise ought to have felt and did not.

"You found the letter, Elise's letter—and read it?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know you were a spy," he said savagely.

"Oh," cried Elise, "don't be so bloodthirsty, Michael. It was quite nice and friendly of her to join us. Come and sit down," she continued, hospitably sweeping aside the billows of blue skirt that lay across the log. "It's quite clean, I assure you," she said, glancing patronisingly at the square cut of Cecily's white drill suit.

With Elise's voice and accent, all the old hatred swept back across Cecily.

"Come away, Michael," she exclaimed, "she has bewitched you."

"Look," mocked Elise, "poor little thing, she's all white and trembling, like a bled calf. And no wonder. It must have been a shock to come upon such a bit of nature as we two made just now. *Ciel!* what a sight for a virtuous sister!"

Her laugh rang out with a gaiety that was not all malice; after all, she had something of the *brave garçon* in her disposition.

"How dare you speak like that?" demanded Cecily, turning on her tormentor, while Michael shrugged his shoulders and tried, by rolling over a fir-cone, to prevent himself from attending to what the girls were saying. In his irritation at being made a bone of contention, he scarcely knew which was the more annoying of the two, the termagant or the tease.

"And if it comes to dare," said Elise, leaning forward so that the light sparkled on her vivid face, "how dare you treat me as you have, like a bit of dirt? A curt nod, a 'Good morning, Elise,' as if I were the milk-woman. That's all, wasn't it? You, with your beggarly gentility. I was of the *canaille*, was I not, and only the man of the precious Strode family could know my sort. There, he's gone," she

said, as Michael disappeared. "Well, you've spoilt our evening. I hope you're satisfied."

She rose and shook out her furbelows.

"Why," she asked curiously, looking into Cecily's eyes, "do you hate me so? Don't you think that, perhaps after all, I'm not as bad as you think?"

"I'm—sorry," said poor Cecily, feeling the world sinking under her at the turmoil of her own sensations.

"I'm glad of that," said Elise, pursing up her lips. "For, do you know, I shouldn't have tried to—to scalp Michael, if you'd been a bit decent to me. I waited and waited for weeks after I got home to see if you'd come to see me. Then, when you didn't, I thought perhaps you'd send me a note to ask me round to tea. You see, we had been sort of friends years ago," she added wistfully.

"Oh, I am so sorry. I have been horrid, Elise. Will you forgive me?"

Somehow she knew that, whatever Elise might be, the simple picture of disappointed waiting was absolutely true.

"Well, I suppose I'd better if I'm going to be your sister-in-law. Not that I've quite made up my mind, yet," she said, drawing herself up as she saw poor Cecily start and inadvertently freeze once more.

"He's a dear, of course, though in one way, he's no catch," she continued airily.

"You know, Elise," said Cecily miserably, "you say things purposely that hurt—and then you don't like it when people hate you."

"Well, that's true enough," laughed the other, "but you know I haven't had much of a chance after all—to be decent. Pushed away from one school to another, just to get a varnish, then coming back to mother, who, well—mother's great, but I was born in hate, I reckon, and conceived in mockery.

"And I wasn't good to you," cried Cecily in contrition.

"No, you weren't," said Elise, her eyes suspiciously bright. "But I shall do no harm to Michael. Why do you think I should?" she asked curiously.

In the stillness of the wood, with the clear lilac of the afterglow shining down on the clearing, the artificial was fading from them both. But Cecily could not put her

thoughts into words and Elise continued in clear tones that seemed judicial in their simplicity.

"I can do more for him than you know. For, though you look down on us, my mother is a rich woman with an income very little short of £2,000 a year. She has shops in Manchester, as well as in London. That's earned income, you know. And there's invested capital besides."

"But Michael would not take your money," said Cecily proudly.

"Yet," rejoined Elise, laying one finger on Cecily's shoulder, "you see he loves me. And he can't have me without my money. Oh, oh, oh, Cis," she cried, clapping her hands in an ecstasy, "think of it! To be able to help him. He'll be a great man some day—and I shall have helped him, if it's only with my money. And I shall always have that to think of. I, I, little Elise, who couldn't understand the half or the quarter of what he feels, will have built the foundations for him. Oh, Cecily, Cecily, was there ever anything so lovely in all the world?"

With beating heart in the oncoming of night, Cecily exclaimed:

"Why, you love him, then?"

Elise stood quite still, till in hard tones she answered: "You're like them all, like my mother especially. There's the trail of mean thoughts over everything for me. She plotted for me to catch him and you think I did. And do you know why she was so set on it? Because you all, you Strode women, despised us, wouldn't know us. That was why. But Michael had no mean thoughts. He doesn't know what my mother will give me for *dot*. He loves me —me—me, whom you despise. No, I won't walk back with you," and violently shaking herself free she hurried down the glade and was lost to sight. But she was unutterably happy in the depths of her heart, in the thought that once in her life a beautiful, upspoilt gift was hers to give—and to receive.

Cecily felt, as she walked wearily home, that Michael must really be a great man, for if Elise looked up to him, to what heights had he not already attained?

Not one house of cards, but several, had toppled down that night and Aviolet's most hopelessly of all. For not only

had he made a fool of himself, but he had lured Cecily into the same trap. It was all quite unpardonable of him. Seething with resentment, she lay awake raging at him, then turning over on her side, she held the ringless marriage finger tenderly against her bosom; the poor finger was very bare and unclad, and Heaven was by no means tempering the wind to this shorn lamb.

CHAPTER XII

A GREATER THAN SOLOMON

"LET me come in this minute, Cecily," said Mrs. Strode, the next day, as she vigorously shook the handle of her daughter's door. "Open it at once, or I'll break the lock."

She stood for a moment listening intently for a sound from within. Through the open window across the landing came a warm breath laden with the million scents of the blossoming time, for it was that brief season in the English year when the Pan pipes sound by every streamlet, and the deep valleys folded among the hills are lovelier in their bridal glory than any temple. Yet here was Cecily going about with the strained eyes produced by tears and sleeplessness combined and there was Aviolet desperately stammering through a torrent of talk, lest a moment's silence should prove his undoing.

"Open, I tell you, Cecily. I won't be kept out a minute longer."

Footsteps dragged themselves across the floor and the door was opened a few inches to admit Mrs. Strode.

The broad generous movements of this ample, matronly Juno seemed to make the girl shrink in upon herself, till her chest apparently narrowed and her stature dwindled to childish weakness. Mrs. Strode felt her own bounding strength as a reproach, until, picking Cecily up as though she were a baby, she carried her across the room and sinking into a chair by the window, held her close as she had done years ago over bruised fingers or trodden toes. The broad Buddha figure received the weary little body into its firm grip.

"Cecily," she cried, "whatever sort of a fool you've made yourself, I won't have any lonely crying going on up here. Cry over me, if cry you must."

"I've not been crying, mother."

"Then inside you have, and that's worse. Tell mother, dearie."

But a weak little sigh was the only answer she received.

"My little girl, what have they done to you?" asked Mrs. Strode impatiently. "Here's Louis like a lost soul and here are you—like a body without a soul."

"Have you seen him, then?" sighed the maid tumultuously.

"Of course I have, and told him what I think about it all, too. Here I go away for five—only for five days, mind—and when I come back I find that you children have been getting things into such a coil that 'twould puzzle a Socrates to untie them. And, as Louis is the eldest child, I told him he ought simply to be ashamed of himself for not managing better."

"Oh, mother, isn't it dreadful about Michael? Do you think he will really marry her?"

"Will she marry him, d'you mean? No, she won't, or my name isn't Cecilia Strode. She's been over this afternoon, eating our raspberries and chattering like a paroquet. My dear, it's an untold blessing that Michael looks like a sweep nowadays, for Elise isn't the girl to marry a sweep. A very good thing for her, too, for after the first six months Michael's wife will be just his portmanteau to him, left in luggage offices or attics, till he wants her. Don't you trouble your silly little head about Michael. And if he gets a rap over the knuckles, I shan't bother. Do him good," she concluded viciously.

"Were you nice to Elise, mother?"

"Oh, very," said Mrs. Strode sweetly. "I'm always 'nice' to a power. And Elise is that, for a few years hence she'll be like an old French miniature, when she isn't quite as crude as she is at present. And by then, Michael's skin, I suppose, will have permanently folded into the black grins of the usual stoker's countenance."

Cecily laughed.

"You old dear," she said, putting up a hand to her mother's cheek, "but what does Louis say?"

"Oh, he's more like a withered leaf than ever, and he's going away."

She felt the heart under her hand give a leap, while every vestige of colour faded from the girl's face.

"Little girl," said Mrs. Strode, after a pause, "do you know what my mother used to say to me?"

"No."

"'If there's anything you dread very much, then the best thing to do is to go up to it and smack its face.' I want you to smack this thing's face, dear. You don't think Louis is good enough to marry, is that it?"

"Oh, mother, I don't know. I don't understand——"

"I'm glad you see that, for all this pother, my dear, is because you're just a child and yet have to decide like a woman. No, no," she whispered, as the girl struggled to escape, "whatever crying is to be done, shall be done here on my knee, where I've smacked you and comforted you all your life—and you but just eighteen now. Poor little girl! You think, don't you, that because Louis—can't come to you as you will go to him that therefore you must break his courage and spoil your own life? Well, my dear, 'tisn't so. He's told me everything and yet I should be quite happy in giving you to him. Dear one, passion's a thing that starts up at us from the unknown. It belongs so entirely to a world apart from our everyday selves that I'd rather give you to Louis, with all his slips, than to a man who could cheat or be quietly cruel. Now, what you're doing is to think of passion as sensuality. They're quite different, my child, although passion deliberately gloated over becomes —the horror. And you know I wouldn't give you to Louis if he were a sensualist. But he's very, very far from that. You can't really feel all this, though, can you? Not yet?"

"No, mother."

"Then, he'd better go, for a few years."

"Why?"

"Well," laughed Mrs. Strode, "for one thing he's got his living to earn; he must do some work occasionally, like other folk. And the book can't possibly get written while there are tremors and earthquakes between you every day or two. No, he'd better go and when he's proved himself a bit, buckled on his armour, in fact, well—perhaps he'll come back."

"And perhaps not," said Cecily, turning a ring round and round on her finger.

"Well, of course, you've got to reckon with all the chances," said Mrs. Strode, not sorry to see the girl wince a little at this plain speaking.

"My dear, I think that you, too, will learn something, when you haven't got Louis to dance to your tune. You'll find perhaps that it's rather lonely without a man of your very own and that there are thousands of women who would envy you, with Louis."

"Must he go, mother? I don't want him to go."

"Oh, you very woman," said Mrs. Strode, shaking her, "who will not, and yet will! Yes, he must go. You'll both of you be all the better for two or three years of reflection. And now I want you to go down and say good-bye to him."

"Oh, I couldn't."

"Oh, yes, you can. But if you can't, I shall bring him up here."

"Mother," exclaimed Cecily, "how can you talk so?"

"Oh, dear, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Strode, sweeping the girl into a chair and flinging a dressing jacket over her shoulders, "what a wicked joker I am, for sure. But I always did like the sunny side of the road best, even at midsummer. And now let me do your hair for you. He'll have to carry to-night's picture for many a mile, you know, Cis."

While the tears trickled down Cecily's nose, her mother brushed, and waved, and puffed. "There," she said, looking at last at the girl's head in the glass, "there's a regular figure of fun! A *mater dolorosa* with the top-knot of a painted lady! Come, child, hold up your head and go down looking like a duchess. For, if one doesn't play up to the big moments, what's the good of being alive at all?"

From the top of the staircase she watched Cecily cross the hall and stand hesitating at the drawing-room door.

"Heavens!" murmured Mrs. Strode, "what can I have been doing before she was born to bring her into the world such a contrast to myself? Heigh-ho! is there any scourge on earth to a man as hard as a maiden five foot five?"

It was with the strange sense of unreality that we all experience at first in deeper moments that at last Cecily

opened the door and entered. Then all the unreality vanished, as well as the dread and shrinking when, very stately in her quiet walk, she passed up the long room to the window where he stood waiting for her.

"Louis," she said.

"My darling."

To that simple music beat the motion of the old earth.

Standing close to him, she looked up, while leafy murmurs filled the shadowy room into which one long ray of sunlight threw a stream of radiance that gleamed on the polished surface of the grand piano, and lit Cecily's puffed hair to burnished copper.

"You know I am going away?" he said at last. "It's better for me to go. But when I come back, do you think you will be able to forgive me? For, Cecily, never since I first saw you has there been one disloyal thought to you. You believe it, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, turning her eyes away, till he saw their red, tired lids and ached with the longing to take her in his arms and comfort her, "I know it. But it's for me to grow, I think," she continued brokenly, "grow till I'm big enough to understand you. But you will come back, will you not?"

"Surely."

"To me?"

"To whom else, sweatheart?"

"Ah, you call me that, and I was so hard and cross. And if you forget me you'll—not—come back."

"Do you think I could forget?"

"But," she persisted, "do you think you'll be able to bear with me? For I'm not very clever, you see, and I expect when I get old, I shall say the same things over and over again, as tiresome people do. Do you think you'll mind? And Michael says I'm sugary. Oh, Louis, I'm afraid it won't do at all."

She shook her head gravely, while Louis laughed so that Mrs. Strode heard it upstairs and was somewhat consoled.

"Say one thing," he whispered fatuously, "say it over and over again. Say: 'Louis, in spite of all, I do love you.'"

"I do, I do."

"Then play for me, will you?" he asked, swinging forward the old-fashioned music stool and twisting it up for her.

"Will it be for very long, Louis?" she asked while he fussed over her.

"A few years, perhaps. And, Cecily, the first book may be dedicated to you, mayn't it?"

She nodded, and holding her hands over the keys for a moment, struck into a prelude.

Next to her silence, Cecily's playing revealed more of herself than anything else that she did. For in it she was stronger and more subtle than in everyday life. Now, as it ranged through the house with the merry bustle of dancing elves, Mrs. Strode smiled to herself and murmured:

"And for a season the evil spirit departed from Saul."

She played the older music, deeper in thought, simpler in passion, than the Polish and Swedish measures of today's painful search after the bizarre passions of strained unrest. Like silver footsteps on the mountains, the notes sang of the exquisite moments of life, with a full hearted rhythm of joyous delight that came strangely from Cecily at this moment of parting. Yet, in fact, all pain had vanished; for Louis was there with her now and the lurking knowledge that he would be gone in a few minutes merely heightened the joy of companionship till it became divine. For it is in the sense of joy's evanescence that we experience the full flavour of its bliss.

And leaning back in his chair with his hand over his eyes, Louis heard the singing of the most beautiful bird in the world; on and on it swelled, till he held his breath to listen, while the triumph song faded into the twinkle of the feet that danced to it, and through all the ripple of love's echoes sounded the high sacramental sorrow of the world. Away over the mountains of fair dream he followed it into the light of sunset and evening star. The intimacy at last became unbearable; it seemed far closer than the airy singing of the light joys of the world, till, stopping suddenly, she rose, and Louis knew that she was taking her courage in both hands and mutely bidding him farewell.

The most wonderful bird in the world had stopped singing now and in the dark room there was naught but the

sorrow of coming loneliness. In a heart-breaking moment she whispered:

"Love, must you go?" Then, lower still, "Yes, for we couldn't dream that dream you spoke of—together yet."

It was the sentence of the maiden judge and as Louis bent his head over his hands, he acquiesced. At the door he paused, his fingers fumbling clumsily with the handle.

"Louis," she cried, "Louis."

Then coming deliberately up, she held out her arms.

It was the first time he had held her so, yet even in the swooning passion of her first nearness there was a certain bitterness that had been absent when he first stood on the threshold of the inner sanctuary of her mind. And to remove that bitterness was the purpose of these exile years.

And so, not many hours later, Louis Aviolet took the modern equivalents of the pilgrim's staff and scrip, his ticket and portmanteau, and travelled away over the hills, composing his own epitaph as he went:—

"For with my arms about her
I'd rather go with her to Hell
Than live in Heaven without her."

Thus it will be seen he was not uncheerful but even impishly gay, though he was travelling into the desert that a man finds before him when he turns his back on his heart's desire, for indeed, with careful tilling this desert may be made to bear golden grain.

Thus, therefore, this chronicle leaves him till, in the fulness of the days, he may perchance again appear over the hilltop, this time with the hard-won harvest of a sheaf of printed pages in his hand.

CHAPTER XIII

A PALLAS OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

SNOWY cloud masses swept across the clear, rain-washed sky. The leaves from the yellowing elms in the fields that fringed the squat cluster of foundry buildings were blown in fluttering battalions down all the cinder-strewn roads between the sheds and the long rows of artisans' dwellings, till they whirled at every corner in noisy eddies of rustling sound.

All the powers of the great masters have been again put forth in the effort to give adequate expression to the fading beauties of cities whose sceptre of sovereignty has long since passed into other hands, to paint the amethyst light of the sunset across the lagoons of Venice, or the gloom of velvet shadow that falls from the walls of Florence. But no one has been found to paint Ischa Street, nor is anyone ever likely to make the attempt, until men can paint the unseen. For it is a mean row of red-brick houses and nothing on earth is more depressing than the dinginess of sordid brick. A yellow wall splashed with leprous damp is cheerful in comparison with it, just as openly confessed bankruptcy is less oppressive to the spirit than the smart devices of paltry sharp practice. Yet, after all, it is on Ischa Street and its like that the industries, the commerce and the politics of Europe are built. But, being mainly concerned with the painful question of keeping itself alive, it makes no effort after self-expression and is merely content with being that without which no wealth could exist. Of all the acquisitions on which we most pride ourselves, it possesses but the poorest, meanest insignia: religion takes the form of corrugated zinc in the Mission Church at the end of the road; science appears as a penny story about an aeroplane in the tobacconists' window; literature, as a sea-sketch of Jim Dale, the smacksman, in the same window, and the joy of

the fruitful earth, as the meadow which the butchers use for supply purposes and where the gulls and rooks circle like excited guests round the three pigs' houses in the corner under the row of elm trees.

In the front bedroom of the middle house in Ischa Street Michael Strode was working at design-drawing at a table set in front of the window. Behind him the large hummocky flock bed showed that he had just finished a nap on it and now, owl-eyed after his sleep and with hair stivering, he yawned aloud, trying to make headway against the combined fatigue and depression that had come over him in a wave of discomfort. He had been at work at the Phoenix foundry now for several months and was beginning to realise that first fact of existence which makes a man out of a child—his own infinitesimal size in a crowded world. Here at the foundry whose smoke poured across the streets that cluster on the south bank of the Exe, he was in the position of an interloper knocking at the gates of a world that denied him the right of entrance to it, or at any rate only opened the merest chink to him now and then. He was ruefully conscious of the fact, even while he laughed at it, that here was a whole sphere which had no need whatever of him, but was all-sufficient to its own needs. In short, if he was ever to gain a real admittance to this existence round him, he would have to wait years to do it.

And to what end? For after a lifetime devoted to exploration, he would be in the position of a man who has spent his life learning an earth-language—with no chance to talk it anywhere save in Heaven.

As a barrel-organ began to grind out a tune at the end of the street, his thoughts started on a rambling pilgrimage, while the jigging notes sent a wave of pleasure through the chambers of his brain, for after the barren fare of Ischa Street even a barrel-organ sounds joyous and it is not only the children's feet that dance to the merry swing of its tunes: staid housewives may be seen, now and again, doing a little pirouette on the sly. For in Ischa Street there are very poor fringes on life's robe and after all is said and done, it is for the sake of the fringes that the human being endures the tedium of work, bearing eight or ten or twelve hours'

work daily, just for the thrill of a moment that comes perhaps once a week, or once a day, if he is lucky.

It is, however, by the curious obliquity of human foresight, chiefly by its efforts to cut off the pleasant fringes of life in Ischa Street that the despotism of a benevolent middle-class government makes its presence felt. A shilling on the winner? anathema; football? brutal sport; the social club-house at the street corner, which, also by benevolent despotism is a tied house? centre of evil. So runs the litany of bridge-playing sportsmen, with their dinner-parties and clubs and restaurants. Small wonder that they talk a great deal about one law for the rich and one for the poor down in Ischa Street.

Yet, beside the question of fringes, there is another aspect of life here, where the old proverb, the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat, evidently had its birth. Since, if one stands in the street on a fine summer morning and listens with eyes shut, one would swear it was no street that surrounded one, but an echoing nursery of twittering younglings; above the caged canary's song there is no sound but the incessant murmur of children's voices, babbling, laughing, crying. In Ischa Street there reigns as great a will to live as ever swayed the sea-born breasts of Venice or steeled the iron courage of the Swiss mountaineers. In truth, the heart of Ischa Street is supremely great, for it has the courage to face, not only death, as we all must, but the more awful chances of poverty and want, so thin is the knife-edge that everybody walks there between comfort and misery, so small a mischance to the bread-winner may bring a whole family into the clutches of need. Yet these "brick built houses that face the sun" are not by any means near the bottom rung of the ladder, for the women do not gossip on the doorstep; they only foregather at times over the back walls of the garden, being less sociable, but more *comme il faut* than the by-streets close by, where there are no bow-windows, even on the ground floor and where the gossip tinkles up and down all day, like the refreshing sound of ice against a glass.

At last Michael could bear his own company no longer and descending the steep stairs of the house where he lodged with the foreman of the fitters' shop, he went out

into the street in a spirit of restlessness that was something new to him in the experience of these last few weeks. Moving deeply in his consciousness was the sense of revolt and although it might be revolt at the conditions brought about by his own act, it was none the less painful on that account. It was the deadening, brutalising power of monotonous toil that weighed on him like a heavy hand, the toil that, cramped and extinguished under stifling roofs, beats out of its very nerves and sinews and half-drugged brain the material on which is founded the triumph of modern civilisation. Like a conscious being strapped to the operating table, he could feel the curari working; for it is the heavy, mindless burden of machine-driven labour, unlike the hand-labour of the past into which a man could build his finest powers, that makes at once the problem and the curse of latter-day industrialism. It is this brainless, heartless toil, far more than mere poverty, that embitters Socialism and drives men to the fierce rampant meanness and outspoken greed of current politics. But even so, to Michael there was present a sense of the true nobility of bodily labour, the cross it carries of higher powers deadened and stifled in the exercise of the lower—the lower that are more useful to society in its present stage.

Yet he strained to escape and knew that, if the way opened, he would escape. It was not the same man who had gone gaily down the stairs of the Half Moon Hotel that now stood knocking at the last house in Ischa Street and watching a woman's shadow that passed across the blind, between the fireplace and the window table.

Probably ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have called Philippa Halliday plain, though the hundredth, were he a man who valued meanings, might have had his doubts about it. The grey eyes that looked at everything steadily were keen, alert and sparkling with life, but without a shadow of coquetry. The head was well shaped under its coils of brown hair smoothly parted above the low forehead and pale face, with its contours worn by energy of brain and body.

She was working at her task of getting up a lace-trimmed blouse with the busy intentness of a capable worker who takes pleasure in the perfection of her handicraft, now hold-

ing the iron a few inches from her cheek to test its temperature, now deftly running the sleeve-board into position. That sleeve-board was significant, for Philippa Halliday, who did all the work, the ironing, washing, cooking, and cleaning of her little lonely ménage, never tried to achieve against unnecessary odds; the appurtenances of her household were perfectly supplied in all dainty ways, and she never attempted to draw corks with a hat-pin or to hammer nails with a hair-brush. The room, too, was pleasant and even beautiful with its plain green walls and packed bookshelves of plain deal, its well-polished stove and cheap bamboo chairs. Fitness was the note of everything.

She welcomed Michael with the quiet good-fellowship that only work in common can give to ordinary men and women, and if there was a slight momentary flush in her cheeks, one must remember that ironing is very heating work indeed.

"I'm feeling beastly," said Michael, dropping into a chair and lighting his pipe, while Philippa went on with her work.

"Yes?" she asked placidly. "I suppose you're getting tired of us down here at Phœnix."

"I suppose I am," answered he. "But what beats me, is how you go on with it."

Philippa was Mr. Clatworthy's typist and secretary who, defying the tradition of the villa, had elected to take a house in Ischa Street among the employés of the works where she gained her living. It was part of her nature to enjoy slapping the face of conventions and to feel herself part of a great movement for freedom when she merely shortened the skirts of her dresses.

"Oh, I like it," she said simply. "You haven't time to think about yourself when every hour of your day's filled with work that you know you can do perfectly. I like to go to bed so tired that before I know I've been asleep it's time to get up."

"It's a slave's life."

"Very well, then I must like being a slave, I suppose. Oh," she cried, with a thrill in her voice, "you don't know what it's like to have to *prove* that your work's worth something, that you can be efficient, that you mean something in the world, that you're not a doll or a mindless simpleton.

No *man* can possibly understand what it feels to be a woman nowadays. Why, every well-worded, well-typed letter I turn out is a piece of pure satisfaction to me. No, of course, you can't understand that."

"Come out for a walk," he said abruptly, man-like fleeing from any tension of feeling which he could not understand. "Do, it will do you good."

The girl laughed and ran upstairs for a hat and coat. She prided herself at that moment on the fact that she never looked in a glass; her hat went on as easily as a man's.

Philippa Halliday was to all intents and purposes a reincarnation of her great-aunt Rachel Halliday translated from a simple age to a more complex one. Where Rachel had managed a farm incomparably better than any gin-tippling man, Philippa had educated herself, reading books which told her how things had got to the pass in which she found them, and training herself to an efficiency that should disprove all sneers at women's feebleness. Strenuous, clear-sighted effort was the basis of her nature and anything in the nature of an illusion she made a point of dragging into the clear light of day.

Hence she read science and political economy and had long ago given up the idea that there was any spiritual clue to the mystery of life, though there was every reason to suppose that things in the material world might better themselves in time, till, of course, the earth comes to circle, a dead planet, round a dying sun. Having settled these points, she gave herself up to the satisfaction of making the best of her own circumstances, of fitting such means as she had to such aims as were conceivable and deliberately turning her back on things that were not for her. For she knew very well that the men who matched her mind she would never meet and if she did, they would pass her by for a face or a figure or, more likely, for that charm of femininity, that "Come hither" in the whole personality that rules men, in Ninon de l'Enclos, no less than in the simpering, giggling bit of blandishment at the street corner. In the pride of her self-sufficiency, Philippa was a Pharisee rejoicing that she was not as other women are, cast down in spirit, or elated by any man on earth. Slim, alert, ready, with her fine head and beautiful hands, she was a

fate to herself, self-respecting and more than a trifle self-absorbed.

The two turned up the street towards the wider thoroughfare that leads to the banks of the river. Michael had long ago discovered what a pleasure it is to walk with a woman who makes no tacit appeal for forbearance on account of any weakness in herself. In Philippa, as he walked by her side, he could feel the swing of a life as strong and tireless as his own. The quality might be merely physical, but he suspected a mental equivalent.

As they passed in front of a house through the open windows of which echoed the clear notes of a fine voice, Philippa exclaimed impatiently:

"How I hate all that!"

"What, music?"

"Yes, music, and novels and pictures that make the real thing seem so sordid and ugly. I don't mind pictures of beautiful country, for there is such a thing as that. But dream pictures are foolish and weakening and unless they can show the beauty of the common reality they ought to be burnt. For they all, and especially the novels, make you want things you can't get. The real world is where one works hard all day and goes to bed tired out at night. And then, as one grows old, things drop from us, friends, interests, everything. Oh, I know there are some who don't live like that, who have good times, but it's at the expense of other people."

In the tremble of her tones he divined a hunger to which she would not confess.

Michael laughed. "But after all," he said, "the thing the novels write about is love and marriage—and that's as common as anything. It's all around us everywhere, in Ischa Street, as well as in Park Lane."

"Common! common! love common!" she exclaimed. "It's the rarest thing in the world, though the sham they call by its name is common enough. There is no trade in the world so vile as the novelist's, unless it's the milliner's, and the dressmaker's, and the beauty culturist's. But, no, the novelists are the worst, for they describe this perpetual interest in what they call 'love' as a mighty noble thing, and the milliner doesn't do that. There's nothing noble

about that common thing at all; it's a mean, base sort of feeling and, if it weren't for the people who write about it, all the poor foolish girls would at least be ashamed of their incessant absorption in their looks, their ways and their bodies."

Michael looked at her curiously; he was unable to put his hand on the key to her mood, but he knew it was lying around somewhere. Had he been clearer sighted, he would have seen it as it actually was—a revolt against the limitations she had set up for herself long ago, limitations she was only beginning to recognise as fences, now that she had met Michael, the very first man on the same plane as herself whom the limited chances of a working girl's life had brought in her way.

"Love in Ischa Street," she sneered, running her finger along the gate over which they were staring, for they had reached the outskirts of the town now. "Love in Ischa Street! Why, I heard a man call out the other day to a woman who was speaking at a street corner, 'You go home and have ten children! That's all you're fit for.' An apt picture of love in Ischa Street!"

And turning on her heel, she faced round to return by the way they had come.

"Why," asked Michael gently, "do you work so hard? All the evening classes, the lectures, you know, are too much after a day at the Works."

"I want to be worth more," she said, stopping in her steady, balanced pace, and accentuating the word 'worth' with a fierceness that showed how much it meant to her.

"Well," said Michael, "I'm apparently worth nineteen-and-six a week at the foundry, but I don't count it my true worth all the same; the highest work of all is the worst paid. What about the poet who gets £6 for a poem that's a gift to a nation?"

"Those are high and mighty places," said Philippa, "I know nothing about them. I only know that every bit of knowledge I can win gives me more importance, every bit of skill an added respect—for my capacities. Oh, there are other ways of being a woman of no importance, besides having lost your character."

At the bridge they said good-bye, Michael with a half-

shrug at her narrow self-absorption, Philippa with angry disgust at herself for having filled the field with her own troubles instead of with his, for woman has been so long accustomed to putting her own case last that she now feels it something in the nature of an indecency to bring it forward at all. Once in her own room again, she asked herself why she had been so shrewish, for if the day of small satisfactions was, as she had always supposed it to be, the *summum bonum* of happiness for her, why was she now discontented with it?

She knew the answer—the larger world that Michael's ambitions had opened to her; above all, the more gracious width of his nature that had engulfed her efforts and her personality with the resistless onflow of an advancing tide.

And leaning over the rails of the bridge, Michael forgot her altogether as he watched the lights playing on the oily ripples of the water and tried to frame a vision of Elise's face as it shifted before him in a delicate sense of light and colour after the drab hues of every day. He desired her, as a man may turn from the sunless gloom of a northern street to the blazing sunlight of a Melville painting. The clank of the trams behind him passed away into silence in sheer panic of the flesh—only to see her, to hold that faint, elusive loveliness. The fair dread was now a torment, to escape from which he worked till the sweat dripped and the brain reeled. Yet even now, in the dancing wisp-lights of his man's desire, it was good to feel again the energy with which he had that day ploughed the sand, keeping up with the best workers at the moulding, till the consummation came in the fiery hour when the furnace gates were opened.

CHAPTER XIV

EDEN

During these months Elise had been striving, often in vain, to keep unsmirched an honour that to her fancy stood fatally rooted in dishonour. For in the gallant dream of her love for Michael, the letters from her mother that reached her from Paris, or Vienna, or London, were constant reminders of the low world of plots from which she would fain have escaped. Mrs. Lesueur cared for nothing but the successful netting of the fish for which her daughter was angling, till at last Elise began to doubt the very reality of her love, the very honesty of her own motives. For undoubtedly Michael's future career was inextricably interwoven with her desire for him. Believing as she did that he only wanted the goad of opportunity to drive him into the position which was naturally his, she saw herself lifted by her wealth and his talents, into that social importance as the wife of a thriving iron-master which her mother had taught her to value above all earthly gifts.

Meanwhile, unwitting of all this play of motive, Michael was beginning to feel like an urchin in charge of a sweetmeat forbidden to his palate; he longed to project a finger lovingly licked—as a prelude to the final swallowing. For, flying like lapwing to the nest through the red sunsets of those November days, it was to Michael that Elise ran for comradeship. And under this spell, he became a new man, riotously strong in the confidence of his own power to protect and cherish this foundling of the winds. For days he thought of her as shivering in the cold blast of loneliness for lack of his plaidie, till it seemed sheer cowardice not to insist on wrapping it round her. Doubtless, too, in his perplexity, the example offered him in Ischa Street of daring defiance of fate by starting on married life with the sole possession of a tea-set or a chest of drawers had some-

thing to do with the reckless leaping over the accidentals of money and furniture that led him at last to the willing maid who in Ischa Street is the one essential for the launching into matrimonial seas.

It was in church, after all, that the end of his hesitancy came when, with a nerve-shattering shock, a wonderful possibility peeped at them round a corner. With shrill recoil of protestation they leapt back from it for a second, but, once seen, so beautiful was its face that they were lost.

It came at the end of a wonderful dream-Sunday during which they had walked for hours in the woods, with interspaces for rest on those stiles which form a lasting testimony to the humanity of English landlords, set up as they are as a tribute to the delightsome English country love, all cow's breath and cider, with no tinge of cynicism about it, though with more than a touch of the earthiness that keeps the savour of the ripe juices in it. Happily tired at the end, with the sun gold reddening strong face and dainty, they dropped into a valley set deep in tree-sheltered hills, where there is an inn, rollicking with hounds, and dreamy sweet in the garden freshness of its flowers that, even now, so late in the year, peeped prudishly round the corners of the windows at Elise sitting with her feet on the fender, the better to show the petticoat cajolery that topped her small, stout shoes. Through the garden greenery trailed a row of ducks waddling homewards, slugging as they went just as, once balls of yellow fluff, they had slugged beneath the tall eucharis lilies that had nodded in the meadow-scented breezes of the summer that was over.

The church on the hillside above being left with door agape, Michael and Elise stepped into it, pausing for a moment to glance at the queer transformation by which, in Efford church as elsewhere, the words of Him who came to bring, not peace but a sword, find their interpretation in terms of territorial manoeuvres and electors' lists, as though "Be strong, quit ye like men," had no signification but in terms of the flesh.

With head flung back in the joyousness of time and mood, Michael walked up to the altar with Elise by his side. In the musty smell of the place, half-mortal and of the charnel-house, half-spicy with the savour of Sabbath ease, they

stood still side by side, as the darkness of the evening stole through the tree-shaded windows, murmurous with the night-wind. Elise smiled upwards with a sense of delicate intimacy, for in the utter stillness within a spirit was abroad that played a dulcet measure on their hearts, a measure to Michael all the more maddening for being, so to say, cradled in sanctity and born in a mixed odour of mortality and reverence.

Moistening his lips he said, half-aloud, so that the mocking echo of an echo sighed down the aisle:

"I, Michael, take thee, Elise, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part."

"Till death us do part," said the only real echo, Elise's voice. Then, in a half-whisper, while the wind that had been battering for entrance suddenly blew open the door:

"Why don't you do it really, Michael?" she said, pulling him up to the altar rail by his forefinger and murmuring, 'I, Elise, take thee, Michael, to be my wedded husband . . .' and am willing to do it the very first day the law of the land allows."

Half-laughing, half-panting, with quick steps that hurried her breathlessly along, Michael swung Elise down the aisle, rejoicing in the Rabelaisian paganism of the moment that broke through all the ecclesiastical starch and whalebone to a jest so sweet as this. He hugged her frankly as they reached the last pillar.

Later on, as, winking at its hot strength, she put her lips to Michael's glass of whiskey at the inn, he said suddenly:

"Did you mean it, Elise, what you said in church?"

She peered, bird-like, over the steaming glass, tremulous to see the adoration in his eyes.

"Oh, Michael, if only we could," she cried. "'Tisn't so mad as it seems, for mother would give me to you in a moment. She said so, only—I can't speak to her about it now. And I'm rich, or she is, which is all the same. I never told you, dearest dear, but 'tis true."

"Would you?" he asked, speaking of the sugar candy, not the filthy lucre.

"I truly consider it's the wisest thing," she said, demurely meditative through the lightning flashes. "It came into my head as we stood there. Whenever I want an inspiration after this I shall go to church. 'Twill be wisest, I'm sure. I can't bear home any more. And truly, truly, I'm getting just skin and bone."

She held up a round arm for his inspection. So earth dropped a ruddy apple at Michael's feet and, being Adam's son, he stooped to examine it, and stooping, fell. Whereat, as in other apple-eatings, many things befell that were not anticipated by the pair who found the luscious, red-cheeked fruit, into whose reddening place in Elise's breast 'twere better not to pry. Yet that she loved Michael is as true as that she longed to escape from her mother.

"Oh, Elise," cried he at the door of the inn as they left, "can you trust me and in a little house and perhaps with no money?"

"La, la, la, 'tis I who have the money and I like it best that way, too," she answered, naïvely truthful, "but are you strong enough, that's all—to take me?"

"Strong!" he cried, exulting berserk-wise in his strength, as he lifted her up, up, into the air. "Strong! Why, I'm Atlas with you to carry."

She gurgled trills of delighted laughter that brought the landlord out to listen to the "pretty poppet" inside, and while going home in the train, she astonished Michael by her knowledge of the marriage laws.

At length come to grips with his own purposes, Michael was growing a man, now that the misty dreams of bookish fancies were vanishing before the onslaught of the real world, like sullen shades that scatter at the lusty crowing daylight. Fevered, he had stripped and plunged into the sea of labour and by the plunge had settled, once and for all, that he was to be man of action, not philosopher. Before a man of Michael's calibre there are only two alternatives—he must either become a constructive thinker, planning his four-square city of Utopia with the dry, mathematical exactitude of a Comte or a Fourier, or he must find his joy in a great business, watching gleefully the powers opposed to him and feeling the battle-lust to the last fraction of nerve-force. Like the skipper of a sailing vessel, Michael

would "carry on" to the last inch of canvas, daring the powers to drive him to his beam-ends.

For all the elation of his position, the deepest feeling in Michael's mind just now was a sense of irritation; he girded at the power his passion for Elise had over him, even at the moment that he gave way to it. He was by no means in the dark as to the nature of the attraction she had for him; he was only mistaken in the means he took to cure it, for, like a man who swallows a gnat to prevent its harrying his cuticle, Michael leapt on marriage. The general issue of his hidden anger, however, was the feeling that he was in a false position altogether in the Phoenix Works. Certain overtures made to him by Mr. Clatworthy had heightened this sense in him, for he recognised now that he had the grip of detail, the quick spanning of possibilities that is the sign of the organising brain.

A few days later Philippa Halliday, sinking into a chair by the fire, sat perfectly motionless for a long while. She had just met Elise with Michael and she understood the situation as no one could fail to do who watched the look in his eyes, the look that a man has for only one woman at a time.

From over the way came the drone of a harmonium and the noise mingled with the pain at her heart. She was accustomed to being alone, but to-night the loneliness was a thing that spoke, as she perceived the double isolation of her position, for kept in the background of business life by the mere fact of being a woman, she was yet forced, half by choice and half by nature, to forego the woman's empire of sex attraction. Outside the man's world, she was doubly outside the woman's. Elise had love; Michael had both love and opportunity and the world moved easily to make a way for him. She herself would have neither, but was condemned by the fact of her sex to be a mere writer of letters in a foundry where the man could become a power. She ran over in her mind their many talks of labour leaders, of inventions, of the big world of effort to which Michael was insensibly fitting himself. And while to Elise the thought of Michael's chances was sweet as a part of her own aggrandisement, to Philippa it was an added bitterness.

In the double current of her disappointment, sex antag-

onism, a force only less strong than sex attraction, flamed in her, till she remembered how in childhood she had treasured a bust of Beatrice Cenci, that murderer of man.

Then, unprecedented event, the slow tears trickled down her face, till a saying of Michael's came with tonic force to her mind:

"Till a man begins to do what he can't, he's damned little use in the world."

Holding her fist firmly pressed on the table by her side, she waited—fighting herself.

CHAPTER XV

THE WAY OUT

THROUGH the tobacco smoke that threaded the air of the club-room in wisps and skeins of greyness, Michael looked down on the faces upturned to his. Three benches to the left were occupied by women leaning back with the detached air of church-goers conscious of tight dresses and it was to these emotionally aloof figures that Michael most often turned, as though testing the power of his thought to melt indifference, rather than to the men who bent forward, legs crossed and arms spread on bench backs, to listen with ears and eyes and open mouths, each choosing his special organ of absorption. Many were men from the Phoenix Works, but the majority were regular attendants at the club who gathered Sunday after Sunday to listen to addresses on all the affairs of earth and heaven, from woman's suffrage to the higher criticism of the Bible. The red-washed walls were now placarded with notices of a forthcoming lecture on Spiritualism, for with the working man the written word has not yet usurped the place of the spoken, as is the case with other classes.

Raised now above the level of the eyes that watched him, the true proportions of Michael's figure became visible and the head lost its air of over-weighted massivity. The face in its calm had become almost a mask; only the eyes were a-fire, not with thought, but with energy. It was this driving force alone that kept every attention riveted on him, for the thoughts he expressed were in no wise novel; he was plainly more historian than seer, more interpreter than thinker. Yet, after all, it was revolt that flamed in every glance, that gave the meaning to every sentence. And not a revolt against poverty only, but a far deeper, more searching defiance of the hopeless attitude of to-day's criticism of life. It was evident to Mrs. Strode, at least, that his

whole position was that of one who flings a gauntlet in the face of the prophets of evil. It was the challenge of youth to age, of faith to experience, that gave the zest to his quiet sentences. With a sigh she listened, seeing an imaginary figure threading the double line of tormentors who flick the buffeting handkerchiefs of rebuff that age more than the passing of the years.

At bottom, however, her sensation was of envy, as was that of Mr. Clatworthy who, far back in a dim corner, sat drawing the ribby strands of silver hair between his fingers. "Energy, energy, energy," he said to himself, coveting its possession so intensely that at last he began to feel that, by absorbing all this lid-lifting steam of power in the vomiting furnaces of the Phoenix Works, he would be playing the rôle of providence and preventing a catastrophe of revolt that might result in the blowing up of paving stones. The Phoenix Works would, with Michael tied to them, be just as useful as conscription in occupying the blasting explosive of youth. For Mr. Clatworthy's feelings as he listened were very much those of the suburban paterfamilias towards a revolutionary anarchist, especially when the fellow takes to revolver practice in that stronghold of mediocre constitutionalism, London. Once absorbed, however, in the fierce competition of business, there was little doubt that Strode's powers would be used to drive grist through the mill, not of reform, but of gain.

In the women the speaker excited emotional fluttering: Elise opened petal lips to breathe delight at her own mastery over this big thing; Philippa nodded approval; Mrs. Strode shook her head regretfully; it was Cecily only who gazed awe-stricken. She was not critical of the matter, being lost in wonder at the mere fact that anybody could venture, erect on hind legs, to instruct his fellows.

It was in a quiet, almost toneless voice that he began to sketch the history of labour from the time when the Romans called the people 'proletariat,' those whose only service to the State is to spawn, up to the moment when the power machine attracted the workers into cities. With that change not only did the labourer find the collective voice which has worked so many wonders for him, but for the first time it became conceivable to get a bird's-eye view of the way

in which civilisation's rough work is done. Such a view had never been possible before, since the serfs and slaves who had preceded the era of so-called free-labour had always worked as scattered units.

"Serf labour, slave labour, poverty labour," he said, raising his voice to more emphatic tones and furrowing deep the two wrinkles between his eyes, "that is the order of history. We live now under poverty labour and, in one sense, under poverty labour we shall always live. For the professionals and the shop-keepers work because if they don't they will have to go without the things they want—just as the labouring classes do, but with this fundamental difference—that the professionals and shopkeepers *do* get the things they want in fair enough measure on the whole, and the industrial classes don't. In short, the work of all classes is poverty labour, but the one class that does not receive the fruits of its labour is that proletariat whose teeming births, in the midst of a declining birth rate, still form the most interesting fact about them and who are even now, where trade unionism does not intervene, bound by that Iron Law which decrees that nothing but a dead level of wage is possible.

"Of the fruits of his labour the hand worker gets in the main just as much as will keep him alive and produce enough of him in the future to work our mills and mines—just enough and a bit over, to swell the ranks of the unemployed. Yet his work, though not as difficult as that of the thinker, is more necessary to the State and takes as hard a toll of bodily strength.

"For this state of things there are proposed two remedies, as you all know; one, that of the trade-unionist, who demands the minimum wage and the other, that of the Socialist, who claims the full produce of his work for the worker. Both remedies mean State intervention, for the trade-unionist is not strong enough to secure the minimum wage in any save highly organised trades and nothing but the State can knock out of the hands of the capitalist the gain he holds. Moreover, to the making, and, above all, to the selling, of any article, there go not only labour, but organisation, and inventive talent, and capital. All three factors of production have their right to payment. To give all to the hand

worker would be merely to shift the burden of injustice from one side to the other; hitherto, it is capital that has taken Benjamin's mess; then it would merely be labour. But we need not fear; the millennium will be here long before such a turning of the tables as that.

"Yet none the less capitalism, in the sense of a relatively small number of men holding the means of life, stands condemned. We may be sure that the great industrial nations of the future will never put up with the miserable makeshift of a life which is all that this system has been able to produce. Hundreds die in our streets of starvation, thousands more live lives of lingering misery. Worst of all, the busy, prosperous worker is a stunted being to what he might be in a wise social state. Yet—it's the merest commonplace—the earth produces enough to feed her children; her breasts were never fuller than they are to-day.

"Capitalism stands condemned; nay, it's dying. It may linger on its death-bed for centuries, but it's going. And the life of the future will not be in the hands of the politicians, or the preachers, or the writers, or even of the Trade Union leaders, and labour members of Parliament. It will be in the hands of that same proletariat whose forebears were once slaves, once serfs and are now under the Iron Law that starves the child in its cradle while the peoples are crying out for men."

"Rank socialism," muttered Mr. Clatworthy, "yet he might be a power—tamed, tamed. I'd like to see the taming of him."

"Nor," said Michael, after a pause, "will the State control the means of production, though you who are Socialists think so. It may in the long run, I grant, after many centuries, but from private ownership to pure unadulterated State control is too great a leap. We distrust our States too much for that, even if we could compensate on so vast a scale. No, if you're training for the high jump, you don't start off with a six feet leap at once.

"There is a step between private ownership and State ownership, a step not only necessary from the political state of the case, but infinitely more so from the human facts. For the worst indictment you can bring against machine-labour is not that it starves men of bread, but that it is

soulless, that it puts the mind in prison, till, where the old craftsman was an all-round man, with the interest, the delight of his life, springing from his work, the machine-feeder is a mere part of his machine, with no interest in the doing of his work and no love for his completed task. That, even more than the distribution of wealth, is what we have to set out to alter, under penalty of setting up a life of pure, unadulterated brainless materialism.

"I repeat it: there is a way to bridge the gulf between private capitalism and State ownership and that same way, the missing link for which our social reformers are waiting, will also lift the factory hand into intelligent participation in the purposes of work, will turn him from tool to man once more. It is a way that was foretold a hundred years ago by three men whose names have often been a butt for ignorant mockery; it is productive co-operation and the prophets of it were Fourier, St. Simon, and Robert Owen."

There were many co-operators among the thrifty audience before him and at the last name a sporadic cheering began.

"These three were laughed at. They have been laughed at for nearly a century. Yet slowly, tentatively, they are coming into their own at last. They were fantastic in details, they were Utopian in hope, but they knew the way out. They found it nearly a century ago, and now at last, here and there, in this ship-building yard, or that iron foundry, their plan of the new age of industrial production is beginning to be applied."

During the pause that followed he smiled down on Elise, till several eyes turned in that direction and Mrs. Strode's heart contracted with a pang of prescient alarm as she observed the girl's buoyant glance. It was abundantly evident that Michael was ripe for any drastic action and as ready to set up a joint household as to start a co-operative factory; unfortunately the first was much more within the bounds of possibility than the second.

"Yes," he resumed, "the co-operative factories of the immediate future will be the training ground for the socialist, or rather communal, States of the far-distant future. It is the workers in the co-operative factories that will rise everywhere during the next fifty years who will be the producers, distributors, owners and managers of the wealth in

whose production they were once exploited as mere tools. Those factories are the training grounds of the future citizen—training grounds, not battle-fields, mind you; for the trade-union fights that have been the battle-fields of the past have taught, like all battle-fields, grit, resolve, comradeship—and hatred. It is not battle-fields we want now, it is schools, for alas, it is not after deadly warfare that the combatants shake hands in an access of brotherly love, and in the strife of Capital and Labour, the hatred lives on after the fight and the more embittered side is the beaten one. But they've done their part, these fights—they've taught a large proportion of the industrial classes what they had to learn—shoulder to shoulder. It is, in fact, on the disciplined ranks of the trade-unionists that the co-operative factories will be built.

"Yet in one thing the worker has never been trained—to use and develop his administrative ability. He has to learn to stand aside and let ability have its chance to act and to earn far more honour, far more money than mere sinew and muscle could ever gain.

"When in the joint stock business of a great factory, each man has learnt to take his place in the order in which his natural talents place him, to show no suspicion, malice, or grudging when men of his own class leap over his head by the favour of nature that made them, not more useful, but rarer than he, then the grit learnt in warfare will have had its crowning attribute.

"And all the discipline needed for the future citizen of a healthy, not a rotten, nation like ours, will be acquired in the managing committees, the general councils and the reformed workshops, where the capitalist is not one man, but a multiform man, made up of thousands of units, each playing his part for the common well-being, from the apprentice up to the director. Co-operation may have to be for a time supplemented by a State insistence on the minimum wage, but no healthy State can possibly be based on anything but individual, purposeful action on the part of the great majority of its citizens. And individual, purposeful action in the industrial sphere is supplied only by voluntary co-operation and mass, not State, ownership of capital; for that method alone offers the supreme test of character to

millions, the test spoken of long ago in the comparison between the man who taketh a city and that far greater man who ruleth himself."

As the spirit of the speaker filled the room, Elise Lesueur became conscious that in the thudding of her heart there was the burning pain of passionate resentment. It was the same sense that had irritated Cecily and grieved Mrs. Strode, only felt by Elise's less disciplined mind in a far more poignant fashion. Here on the very eve of their marriage, their secret marriage that had filled her days and hours with tremulous fever, he could lose himself in the claim of a world for which she cared less than nothing. It was utterly intolerable to feel her power over him so slight that for whole hours he never gave her a thought. It was, as she knew, always difficult for him to speak, though easy to act, yet here he was preaching like a ranter, after such nerve-twisting effort and room-pacing and coffee-drinking as only Philippa knew—and all this when he ought to have been turning one incessant mirror of pre-occupation on her own fascinating, dainty self. For to Elise all the world was a reflecting gallery that gave back visions of her at every angle as she walked; it was sheer hell to feel only the dull, dead surface of wood turned on her from Michael.

While his periods flowed on she felt herself dwindling to a tiny speck, lost, even to her own mind, in the panorama of ideas that unfolded itself before her eyes. It was a vast jealousy that invaded her, a jealousy wider than the mere sense of another woman for, like the searching spirit of the Lord, neither in the heights nor the depths could she escape from it. Her eyes grew horny under pricking eyelids as she watched the end of the proceedings and saw Joseph Clatworthy push his way to the front and beg to be introduced to Michael's mother, whose sturdy, practical mind was much harrowed by these vague outlinings of a far-off Utopia to which she had been listening.

"Yes," she snapped, in answer to Mr. Clatworthy's dithyramb of admiration, "yes, it's all very well laying the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem in the clouds, but for my part, I like to have something solid that I can put my foot on."

"Between ourselves," said Mr. Clatworthy, following her

lead like a man of the world, "I quite agree with you. But the mother of *such* a son should be compact of wisdom. And it's my belief that there's more in his ideas about kitchen stoves than New Jerusalems."

It ended in Michael and his employer going off to discuss kitchen stoves, while Mrs. Strode remarked to Cecily: "Too gentlemanly to be a gentleman, my dear. He has the air of an elderly, but inspired, shop-walker."

The pilulous smallness of satisfaction to Elise in having Michael for a lover had completely vanished in the feeling that nobody knew of it, for, if marriage were henceforth to be secret women would be found even more unwilling to submit to it than men are at present. It was salt to a wound for Elise to recognise that Michael could show her no special attention in public. Being a woman who revelled in the sense of injury, she barely glanced at Michael as she left the room, and lifting her skirts with a grandiose air of casting the dust from her feet, scarce vouchsafed the courtesy of a blinked eyelid to Philippa.

That evening Michael came to Elise neither at seven, nor at eight, nor at nine, and moaning to a heedless universe, she lay sobbing till her head was racking and her eyesight blurred. Mentally she composed letter after letter in burning words whose every accent scorched, farewell letters of bitter irony, letters that with hysteric perversity tortured her far more than they would have the recipient. Towards morning she rose and, shivering at the cold of the water bathed her aching face. Then, with trembling fingers that could scarcely hold the pen, she wrote five lines to Mrs. Strode. It was an announcement, curtly worded after the lengthy epistles of her rage, that by the time the letter was received Mrs. Strode would have a daughter-in-law.

CHAPTER XVI

BUSKIN AND PIERROT

Up and down the room, to the accompaniment of the fierce rattle of the sou'-wester that shook the window-panes and lashed itself against the stout walls of Snug Harbour, Mrs. Strode paced, her dark figure outlined for a moment against the expanse of wild sky that stretched above the estuary. In the room there was no sound but the tapping of her high-heeled shoes on the polished floor and the rustle of her skirts against the crackle of a newly lit fire. In the buoyancy of her swinging tread there was the fierceness of an anger that, its first uprush over, was now fading into pity. For the full rounded irony of the situation in which Michael had landed himself was as complete as though he had, indeed, been the sport of the Immortals.

Laying down three papers on her writing table, she contemplated them with a smile, half-bitter, half-pitiful: Elise's note announcing her marriage, Michael's letter describing the terms of an offer of partnership from Joseph Clatworthy, and finally a wire from her brother, Mr. Costelow, in answer to one of her own enquiring the character of the proprietor of the Phoenix Works. The wording of the last was succinct:—"An old fox. Do nothing *re* partnership till I come West in three weeks' time."

At this point she heard three whistled notes from below the window. It was Michael's customary signal and a few minutes later he entered the room that was, alike to Cecily and himself, the inner sanctuary of the house. Over there on the brass bedstead, his father had died and his sister and he had been born. Here in this room had always taken place such preachments as Mrs. Strode's merry heart had allowed her to indulge in. Perhaps these memories pleaded for him now as, standing half-shamefacedly by the door, he waited.

"Why did you do it secretly, Michael?" she asked, coming nearer and touching him with a forefinger, as though to assure herself at any rate of his corporeal presence.

"There'd have been such a fuss else," he answered with a shrug. "It had to be. What was the use of talk about it? I wanted her, she wanted me. I felt I must get it over quietly."

Having digested with a wry face this only partially accurate summary, Mrs. Strode lifted herself on tip-toe, encircled his big face with her hands and permitted herself one lament. "Why didn't you tell me yourself?" she asked. "That hurts most, that it should come from her."

She nodded towards the fire where the shrivelled wisps of Elise's letter still clung to the bars.

"But," she continued, "you thought a woman always makes a fuss about the doing of a thing, though when it's done, she's perforce obliged to be quiet enough. That was it, wasn't it, Michael?"

He moved uneasily, while she watched him, not ill-pleased at his discomfort.

"But it's you all over," she cried, "never asking man or woman, but—one, two, three, the hammer down. Well, it's a business quality, I suppose, but you see this marriage contract is a thing women pride themselves on understanding better than men do. That's why we always want to meddle. And that," she continued, striking the letter in which Michael had announced his offered partnership, "would be simply disastrous. But fortunately it's impossible. Your uncle would never advance money to make you a partner in the Phoenix Works."

"There is no need to ask him, mother," said Michael quietly, "my wife is, or will be, a rich woman and her mother is prepared to invest the bulk of her money in the Works on condition that I am made a partner in them."

Mrs. Strode drew her breath sharply.

"Michael, it's a trap," she cried fiercely. "You become a pensioner on your wife's bounty, with your position in the Works dependent on her share in it. Do you suppose that either she or her mother will acquiesce in letting their money be played with?"

"Don't say things you'll regret, mother. It is an ordi-

nary business arrangement. If, as I believe, the business prospers under the new life Mr. Clatworthy and I expect to infuse into it, my wife's money will be doubled and trebled in course of time. And I shall be able to carry out my schemes of co-partnership."

"Read that," she said, thrusting Mr. Costelow's telegram into his hand.

"Prejudice," he answered, returning it to her in a moment. "In any case I cannot turn back now. I shall never have such a chance again and I have no intention of refusing either the partnership or my wife's financial aid."

"And if the business dwindles and you lose her money?"

"It is withdrawable at her pleasure before that time comes. I shall see to it that her lawyers fully safeguard her interests. Come, mother, don't let's quarrel. You know I'm no cheat."

"You've handicapped yourself every way," she cried furiously; "what success, what happiness is there possible for you?"

"I can't listen to you any more," he answered, turning towards the door. "We shall be back to-day week, Elise and I. Come then and show you have forgiven us. If I've got a difficult job before me, the more need for your help."

The sound of his footsteps on the stairs seemed to Mrs. Strode an irrevocable good-bye to his youth.

But none the less, on the following Wednesday she found herself sitting in Miss Bowcher's waiting-room, all agog with expectation for the arrival of the bride who was due by the three o'clock train. The two women were silent, till, at the noise of a carriage stopping outside they both rose and hurried to the door, bending on Elise the keenly questioning, yet furtive glance with which women eye a bride. Holding her head high, Elise swept into the room with dainty precision and, lifting her veil, offered a cool cheek to each of the women with the air of a princess conferring a favour. At last, catching Mrs. Strode's eye, her manner suddenly changed and flushing crimson, with all her fine manners gone, she whispered:

"Can you forgive me?"

As she turned roughly away with eyes full of tears, Miss

Bowcher, surprised out of herself, exclaimed: "That's not Elise."

"No," said Mrs. Strode, holding her head as high as Elise's had been on her entrance, "it's my son's wife, I think."

Her heart beating jubilantly, she never waited for permission, but followed the girl upstairs, while her thoughts cried "Victory! Victory!" for her son all the way.

At her entrance Elise looked round from the glass before which she had been squaring her head on the beautiful shoulders now bared of her dress. Heart-bare, too, she flung herself impulsively across the room.

"You think," she exclaimed, "that I hurried on a secret marriage for fear you should stop it. Well, I did. You would have stopped it if you could; isn't it so?"

Mrs. Strode nodded.

"And you hate me, for you believe I don't love him? Yet, wait, think! I gave up for him what all girls want, the fuss of their wedding day. I signed a book in a dirty office to get him. Think, don't I love him? I lay the first night after he had fallen asleep listening to the wind that blew against our windows. It was full of the dearest whispers I have ever heard. My God, if you don't come between us, if he doesn't put me outside his thoughts, we shall make a success of it yet. Don't, don't, come between us."

"I'll not," said Michael's mother, putting her arms round the girl. "I swear I'll not."

That night Mrs. Strode sat reading over the letter she had just written to Louis Aviolet. It was by no means full of the rapturous hope that had sprung up for a moment in her heart at the hour of the bride's return.

"For the foresight of your Cecily, my dear Louis," she had written, "I begin to conceive prodigious respect, since a babe hath confounded the wisdom of her elders. Yes, here I sit, trying to take my punishment as a good boxer should—with a stiff lip. For Michael makes history rapidly, as we always knew he would. His parts are as many as any jester could desire his puppets to dance to; in the present, socialistic tub-thumper and incidentally, husband; in the future, builder of bridges between capitalism and communism and—partner in the Phoenix Works!

"Yes, my friend, husband; the Gretna Green of suburbia, the registry office and, for pursuing post-chaise, an old mother grunting platitudes. But, as you may guess, 'tis somewhat sour jesting with me. What a linking have we here, where the curtain goes up on the dance of a pierrot coquetting with a tragic buskin. I swear I heard the mocking notes of the *Funeral March of a Marionette* when I read the girl's letter announcing her marriage—pert, pretentious, the scribble of a waiting-maid. They're back after a honeymoon of a week and now—ovens, meters, endless processions of horny-handed sons of toil—and the cap and bells of a patched and powdered pierrot. She'd make a good bourgeois wife, if the man would beat her when she didn't keep straight. But as Michael's wife, Michael, the dreamer, who never knows heron from handsaw, or his own fancy from a fact! Yet she loves him; but my heart misgives me for the future. A child may cure all, though at present I can only thank whatever gods there be that I have you as a safety-valve. For the rôle of mother-in-law to a pierrot I have no stomach."

There came a tapping at the door. Outside stood Cecily with a candle in her hand, down which a winding sheet of melted wax had already formed in the chill draught of the passage.

"Mother, my mother, let me sleep with you," she cried, as at last the door opened and Mrs. Strode admitted her.

On the table by the fire lay a collection of balls, a broken catapult or two, and a much-battered rocking-horse—Michael's toys. Cecily glanced away from them half-ashamed as she got into bed. For a long while after she had lain down the noise of rustling paper filled the room and in the morning when she awoke the toys had vanished into the cupboard by the fireplace.

There was a little heartburn of wistfulness in Cecily's own mind as she lay by her mother, trying to comfort with touch and nearness, for she knew that such help as a daughter could bring was but of the outside, as one warms a room where deadly pain is being borne.

"Mother, don't mind," she said at last, trying feebly to break the silence.

"Cecily, don't you ever trust me again," answered Mrs.

Strode. "A woman's all teeth and claws where her children are concerned, but the devil of it is, she doesn't know when to use them. Biting and tearing and scratching—that's what I ought to have been doing, instead of sitting smiling like a broody hen on an addled egg. You were right and I was wrong. But I'm like Michael—always so sure of my own wisdom that the deed follows hard on the thought with me, and I've never any time for hesitation. Come, child," she said, cuddling the girl closer, "we're lone, lorn souls, you and I. Michael's gone and Louis's gone and we're like the melancholy cheeping little hens they kept in our last lodgings, the little hens that had no cock in their harem."

And awe-stricken, for she had never known such a thing to occur before, Cecily found tears on her mother's face.

Soon she fell asleep and sleeping dreamt that she was a rabbit, with Elise in the form of a terrier pursuing her over heathy burrows with the zestful barks of a hot chase.

But the morning light found Mrs. Strode still watching.

Part Two

CHAPTER I

AN UPSITTING

VIEWED from above, the valley of the Exe was a sea of grey mist that rolled across the warehouses and work-yards along its banks, now drenching them in a fierce rain-flaw that blotted them completely from the sight, now bathing them in swift columns of vapour. Rising out of the back of the mist, the ridge of Haldon to the west loomed taller than its wont against the cloud-reek in which its summits were merged. In the centre of this panorama of cloud and coming night there rose a fire-beacon, flaring like some outburst of the nether heat: it was the blast furnace of the Phoenix foundry.

Lower down on the water-level its red-gold light was reflected in the still waters of the canal whose silver streak ran up the river-valley from the sea, straight into the midst of the foundry buildings. At the edge of the square canal-basin was moored the schooner *Lyna* of Stavanger. Here two men and a woman with heads butting forward were pushing an empty truck along the line of rails that connected the foundry and the canal with the district railway station. By the side of the clumsy shapelessness of the men's boots, the small heels of the woman's shoes, down-trodden though they were, spoke as eloquently of femininity in a place of rough toil as did the rakish cock of the schooner's masts and the smoke from her galley fire, of the wide breath of the sea-spaces in this haunt of machine-driven toil.

Built cornerwise facing the basin, stood an old house whose roof and front of old grey Devon slate gave it an almost luminous appearance in the midst of the smoke-blackened buildings of brick. Surrounded by a small square garden where grew a half-wild tangle of box-edged chrysanthemums and Michaelmas daisies, the place looked like a country ghost which had strayed into the heart of an industrial

town in a fit of absence of mind and finding itself hemmed in by bricks, had never managed to escape. It was essentially a country cottage of Georgian date with a solitary elm-tree at the garden-gate that creaked and groaned in a high wind in fretful mourning for its fallen brothers.

As the light waned curious faint shadows passed across the window-panes and with the rising of the wind the creaking of the elm tree began in answer to the sound of a child's crying from inside the house. Up and down the voice wandered, now clear, now stifled by the heavy mass of the staircase. Once a small head appeared at an upper window and a tear-stained face was pressed against the pane till the glass grew dim with its breathing and the child wandered away again. At last with the click of the garden-gate, the boy rushed to the window and began to make frantic signals to the man and woman outside to show that he was locked in.

In the hall, after the window-catch had been forced, Cecily Strode stood pressing the boy against her in a fit of nervousness that, as he was quite sharp enough to know, had nothing to do with himself and the awkward predicament from which she had saved him.

"Why are you alone, Ned?" she asked, leading him into the dining-room which, with its square, ugly furniture and threadbare carpet, looked straight out across the works.

"Oh, father's at the office and mother sent away Kate this morning the first thing and then she had to go out herself, so she locked me in," he said, eyeing the unknown man who had followed them into the room and who now stood near the door in an attitude that Ned recognised as one of protest. It struck him so forcibly as a cross between the carriage of a shamefaced dog and a truculent beggar that he began to laugh.

At the sound the stranger came forward and taking the boy's hand from Cecily's, drew him towards the window.

"So this is Michael's son, I suppose," he said, his attitude of waiting more apparent than ever.

"Yes. This is five-year-old Ned," answered Cecily with a bitterness that even the boy detected.

"Then it's six years since we met," said Aviolet.

"And you did not know it!" exclaimed Cecily, tossing

her muff on the table and noticing that his hair was quite white now. "But I suppose men have no time to count the months," she added. "Come, Ned, let's go to see if we can find anything for tea."

But he hung back as she would have taken him away.

"I heard something," he whispered, "while I was waiting. Turn up the light, Aunt Cecily, I don't want to hear it again."

Switching up the electric lights, Aviolet picked the boy up.

"Ned," he said, "you're like me. I can't bear to be alone in an empty house. Do you hear it still?"

"No," said the boy, pausing to listen.

"Do you think it's still there—what you heard?"

"I don't know."

"I'm going to show you that there's nothing there, that there never has been. You won't mind coming with me?"

"No," said the boy, forcing back the last wave of the fear that had driven him half frantic.

The two went into every room in the house, preceded by the leaping jet of pleasant light and every time he looked, Ned said "Nuffin," in solemn affirmation that the very last tails of his fears were scuttling over the hills of fact. Then came Aunt Cecily with hot milk and bananas, and finally he fell asleep on the dining-room sofa, while the two elders sat watching him in solemn silence.

At last Louis went over to the electric switch and turned off the light.

"I'm like the boy," he said, husky with silence. "I, too, am afraid of something and yet I've to face it. It's those six years."

She bent her head and standing by the mantelpiece, he watched the hands twisted in her lap.

"Yes," she answered, "I think you can never bridge them. Every month I used to say, 'Surely he'll come before the end of this.' But—you never did, only a book from time to time and letters. Very short ones. But I understand."

"Do you? Do you, Cecily? I think not. It was that I might make you understand that I wrote and asked you to meet me here to-day."

"It was a suitable place," she answered, "you see you couldn't come to me in my home. Oh, Louis, I understand very well."

"Sit down and listen," he said sternly. "I may have made a mistake, but if I did, it was to spare you. You'll forgive me when you *do* understand."

"Never."

She rose and standing by the sofa looked down on the boy's pink cheeks and flaming ruddy hair; he was the spirit of gay life that fought so riotously at her heart, the life that begged for a hearing even now. Ned pleaded for Louis as nothing but a beautiful child could have done.

"Tell me," she said, with eyes bright and hard that still asked to understand.

It was a story of the most inarticulate class of all—the literary. For none save a Frenchman or two, and a stray George Gissing, has found either courage or skill to paint the diaphanous drama of the artists' hell, wherein day after day, month after month, there goes on the tight-rope, aerial task of weaving from shadowy fancies the rounded plumpness of living beings, smackable to an enemy's palm, graspable by the friendly hand, no shadow of another's dreams, and no sickly perversion of the author's hungry, jealous self.

Outwardly the facts were simple; the book Aviolet had gone away to write, matured in a tent on a Surrey common, had been another *succès d'estime* and its author had been hailed as a second Fielding. Yet, the money return from it was small and to the trumpeting of the critics there came but scanty largesse from the buying public. Into the writing of the next, into its form, style, character, and truth, had been hammered every faculty of Aviolet's nature. With failing hope he had yet laboured on, recognising, with a pang he strove to hide even from himself, the chaotic shapelessness of his main characters; worst of all, knowing that he was repeating himself in type of story. The diabolic ingenuity of self-harping fears preceded his *débâcle*, his literary Sedan. A third time, hopeless yet still fighting, he had struggled; this time to find the reviewers tender, treating him with the consideration for a man down on his luck that is infinitely more galling than the rabid barking of an outspoken attack.

"And all the while," said Cecily, "I thought there was another woman. For you stopped writing to me."

"There was," said Louis grimly. "I was playing with the tangles of a gorgon's hair, the gorgon of the literary drawing-room. For nothing can be quicker than the way everybody in *that* world savours the make of every new book. 'Pon my soul, they know it before the main plot's licked into shape. They're the carrion crows of the publishing battle-field. They're worse than the fine ladies who wear coats made of the skins of unborn lambs. What a stoking of the eternal bonfire there must be when a publisher's reader or a reviewer comes slapping down the infernal shoot! Ouf! can't I hear the wisps of hair frizzle on their pates!"

Cecily put a hand over his lips, though she felt in her ferocity very much like the terrier who dashes in to pull the tail of the cat the mastiff is worrying.

"Then"—he drew a long breath—"I struck ile in a little book on my life as a nomad. It's in a fifth edition. And now, my Cecily, we'll have two deans to splice us and a bishop to declare the splicing well and truly done. Oh, you small, tired woman, I'll never do anything to pain you again, never give you a moment's uneasiness, so help me all the gods! And, dash my grey wig," he chuckled, "but how much more precious you are to me than if I'd never had to wait for you."

"And all the while," said Cecily sadly, "you've robbed me of a woman's best time."

"What! the years between twenty and twenty-five?"

"No, silly, for I'm not yet twenty-five. But don't you know this with all your knowledge of human nature that there's no time in a woman's life that's dearer to her than when she stands fighting by her man's side? Oh, I know you all, fools that you are, talk of 'sparing' her and pack her away in a turret where she's bored to death, just when she wants to be down in the firing line, loading by your side."

Silently he sat, fiddling with his pipe and tobacco pouch, till, at last, kneeling down on the hearth-rug in front of him, she took both and filling the pipe with dainty rammings of her finger-tip, reached for the matches from his waistcoat

pocket and lit it while he puffed. As the flame burnt up between them, its shadow flickered on lips curved in a woman's happy smile of consent, on eyes that looked anywhere but into the eyes that tried to force hers upwards.

There was a long pause, till Ned, suddenly waking, stretched over on his back and in a small voice that sounded to the lovers like the trump of doom, said as though meditating on their case: "That's very funny."

They waited breathlessly till with a dreamy smile he turned over and fell asleep again.

"He was so funny the other day," said Cecily. "When we passed a house with tan down in front of it, he asked me why it was there and I told him that God had sent Mrs. Wilson a little son last night. 'Oh,' said he, 'how beautifully it must have been packed.'"

"And his mother and Michael? How goes it with them?"

"I don't know, Louis. Truly, I don't. Mother and I try to know as little as possible about it."

"Humph! doesn't sound cheerful."

"Well! Michael rules and Elise freezes, usually. In a way she has everything to make her happy—except one thing and that spoils all."

"What? Michael loved her."

"So he does now, I suppose. Only there's a wall between them, a sort of mental wall, and neither of them can climb it."

Aviolet recognised Mrs. Strode's dissecting knife in this pronouncement and as he drew Cecily closer, he whispered:

"Let's be wiser. Don't let us allow a membrane, let alone a wall, to come between *our* minds."

And in joyful expectation of accomplishing the most difficult act of jugglery in the human conjuror's répertoire, she put her lips to his. As the steam whistle sounded for the closing of the foundry there passed through the room the footsteps of the god that maketh this old world new again; the god of the Eden glory that with his potent wand plumbs for every lover the deep springs of the world's belovèd mystery. And all the while, over on the sofa, Ned puffed away placidly in little sleepy snorts, for the god's footsteps pass as lightly down the temple steps as the mist that steals across the grass-blades.

Suddenly they were aroused by the sound of the opening of the front door and of Elise's voice in the hall.

The six years that had turned Aviolet's hair from grizzled to white and transformed Cecily from girl to woman had changed Elise from one who dimly seeks to one who hungers for a definite satisfaction. Outwardly they had merely rounded and perfected her beauty, so that Louis drew a quick breath of surprise as she entered. She had always worn the air of one who courts attention, but now in her dark furs and sheath-like gown of close-fitting black, she bore herself rather as in the right divine of unquestioned queenship. Seeing her, the old chivalric phrase "queen of love and beauty" rose instantly in one's mind. The tints of face and hair, the curious eyes, hazel with topaz shadows, had the delicate old-world colouring of a Conder fan, the rounded hips and bust the lissom finish of cultivation; men might talk about her lines, but women would indubitably pay her the higher compliment of thinking of a French corsetière.

Yet the formative years had been, after all, years of fierce repression, for while Michael had found himself, Elise had only awakened to the need of finding herself, since the women who ripen quickest emotionally are always slow to sow the mental harvest. Deep-buried in her husband's nature was a vein of hardness as impenetrable as steel, and against this barrier Elise had again and again flung herself with an irritating persistency that had at first wounded, then hardened, and had finally clothed her in mail, till over her heart there was a callous growth, pierceable at intervals by passion, but slowly closing even to that potent sting.

As she greeted Aviolet there was a glow of pleasure in her face, for he belonged far more to her world than anyone she ever met nowadays in a place where men seemed more like particularly intelligent machines than anything else. As he bowed over her hand in a way that none of her husband's visitors could have done, she thrilled as one does when one steps over the threshold of one's own "place." She felt like a scholar with his hand on a first edition, a Verlaine in a *cabaret*. She was touched to the quick as she laughed and jested with her visitor and the feeling made her kindlier in grace, till, placing a hand on each of the lovers as she stood between them, she exclaimed:

"Ah, but how happy you are, you two! In this ugly, shabby place you are in Heaven, and outside, ah, *Dieu*, how I hate it—that wilderness of hideous bricks and iron! Take her away, Monsieur Aviolet, as quickly as possible into the places you write of, where people permit themselves to laugh and do not go about with lantern-jawed face, all for the troubles of the beer-drinking *canaille*."

Then, kissing Cecily lightly on each cheek with a bird's pecks, she whispered:

"Isn't it good, *mon enfant?*"

And Cecily, understanding the wistfulness, put her arms round Elise, whom dimly she was beginning to understand. Then, her eyes starry bright, Elise went over to the boy and touching his red curls lightly, asked:

"Do you like him, Monsieur Aviolet?"

"He's beautiful," he answered gravely.

"But he ought to be in bed," she said practically, and stooping to the boy, she raised him with one effort of her superb strength, till he lay across her with his sleepy face cuddled at her neck.

As Aviolet opened the door for her, she flashed a look at him that showed the old Elise rejoicing for a moment in being the centre of the stage, as a beautiful mother whose grace was enhanced by the child's loveliness. Aviolet smiled to himself in the half-furtive way of a man who has read a vain woman's thought.

"Yet," said Cecily, answering his smile, "she has no friends of her own, only the men Michael brings here on business and you see what a poor place this is. Of course my brother never knows that another woman exists, but still— Even the boy won't be hers long, for Michael only thinks of making him just like himself. It would be different if Ned were a girl; she could feel then that it was her very own child."

Her eyes dark with tears, Cecily looked into the fire, for being, after all was said and done, of the same generation with Elise, she could see eye to eye with her far better than Mrs. Strode, for all the latter's width of mind. To Cecily in these days her sister-in-law was a curious book, one of those wandering records that obey no known laws of writing but are as lawless as life itself.

CHAPTER II

THE WALLS OF JERICHO

THROUGH the open door of the manager's office at the Phoenix Works the white glare of the electric light lit up the quadrangle formed by the foundry buildings. The creeping mist licked the surface of the piled-up heaps of iron-waste, the huge cylinders and knots of rust-eaten chains, and black pools gleamed like small lagoons wherever footsteps had beaten a pathway across the cindery ground.

One side of the square was formed by the office and adjacent dining-rooms; to the left of this vibrated the crazy structure of the fitting shop, its sides echoing with hammers and power lathes and spurting jets of steam from every vent-hole. Opposite this gaped the open chasm of the casting-shed, its yawning abysses lost in rolling waves of smoke and mist. Besides the office, the only building which made the slightest pretence of being anything but the rudest shelter was the engineers' and bookkeepers' office and this, with inlaid blocks of polished granite and coloured glass windows, was garish in its insolent pretentiousness beside the uncouth roughness of factory and foundry.

As he walked impatiently up and down, Michael glanced out at this scene of his labours, pausing only for a second to drum his finger-tips on the great desk of fumed oak that had formerly been Mr. Clatworthy's. From her corner by the fireplace, which was surmounted by a small bronze casting of a half-naked moulder in the style of Constantin Meunier, Philippa Halliday watched Michael anxiously. There was uneasiness in the air of the men who hung about the quadrangle and at the opening of the casting-shed. Every now and then a group would gather round a speaker whose right arm twitched in the short, jerky gestures of anger and excitement. Michael smiled as he watched,

for he knew the fierce crescendo of those reiterated arguments.

It was of the past that he thought chiefly, as to-night he faced the struggle which confronts everyone who would uplift the smallest section of humanity from the rut of ancient custom. No one but Philippa had the remotest conception of the fierce battle which he had fought in the years following Mr. Clatworthy's death and his own sudden assumption of command, a battle waged against business rivals better equipped than himself in everything except energy and ability. For the time that had been spent by Elise in memories of the brief period of her love-making had been to Michael years of climbing when, after the planting of every footstep, he had doubted whether the next would ever be taken.

And now the future, its roots planted deep in a successful commercial venture, faced him big with possibilities of another kind, for he was on the eve of his first serious difference with his men on a point of policy.

Philippa Halliday nervously pressed the palms of her hands together, while the goat-like man with broken teeth who stood in the open doorway alternately pulled the two horns of his beard. Edwards, the foreman-in-chief, was a local preacher who had once gone up to London to pray over Michael personally, trusting in nothing but home-made, West-country intervention with the Deity.

"A set of godless wastrels," he muttered. "But I'm not surprised. They've been given their head too much. Why"—he struck the desk with the flat of his hand—"there isn't one of them that isn't led by the nose by the first tom-fool that bawls loud enough."

Michael was regaining that control of himself which is more a matter of practice than of temperament, for, after all, the ship captain who is calm in a hurricane would quail hopelessly before a nation's madness that never breaks the night's rest of the political leader.

"They're just children," said Michael, "but don't forget this, Edwards—children grow up. We've met with a check, but it was to be expected. Everyone who has tried to introduce profit-sharing by slow degrees has had the same experience. The power of spending in people who have

never had a surplus to spend before always goes to their heads."

Some months previously Michael had set up a bonus system for the benefit of the employés and now, on the near approach of Christmas, the hands in the pattern shop had sent in a request that they might be allowed to withdraw their bonus money, instead of allowing it to accumulate by accretion of interest. When permission had been granted to this department, all the rest were following with the same cry and demanding their money. And it was to men of this childish stamp that Michael was planning to hand over the working of a concern that was now growing to be a great commercial undertaking. Yet in Michael's face there was now no anger, but merely the stern decision that wastes no time in personal annoyance. Philippa sat, all pretence of work abandoned, resting her chin on her hand and waiting for the final upshot of it all. There was in her attitude a certain satisfaction at seeing Michael's hand forced.

"I see what's happened perfectly," he continued. "The majority being all agog to spend have outvoted the sober, businesslike kernel of far-seeing fellows. These exist, all the same."

"Then what's to be done?" asked Edwards.

"Of course," answered Michael, "it's impossible to pay up their demand at once. We simply haven't the money to do it, for I've gone through the figures and it'll take us some time to raise it. We'll call 'em together and promise that in three months' time they shall all be paid in full, if they still wish it. We'll go further and tell them that anyone who wants his money now, if he comes to this office and gives a clear account of why he needs it, shall be paid in full, if his reasons commend themselves to us."

"And not one of them will come," said Philippa, striking in for the first time.

"Perhaps not," said Michael, "but anyway, these measures will stave off the difficulty for the time. By then, we shall be in a position to start again."

"Start again," said Edwards in dismay, "and chuck good money after bad?"

"Start again, with the full scheme I've always intended.

This half-way house of a bonus system has been a mistake and I'm obliged to the men for showing it to me. That's all. If I'd trusted them fully with my scheme of co-operation, there would never have been this trouble,"

Philippa drew a deep breath of relief, for she had been gradually losing all belief in the possibility of Michael's ever being in a position to put in train the schemes he had contemplated.

Through the heavy air came the faint smouldering smell of burnt sand, thick to the nostrils like wool in the damp warmth of the night. The lights were being turned out one by one; from overhead a faint star pierced the mist.

"There's one man," said Edwards suddenly, "that ought to go. It's my belief he's at the bottom of the trouble."

"Parkyn, you mean," said Michael. "Yes, I'm going to see him to-night."

Then, turning to Philippa sharply, he said: "What's your notion of the fellow?"

Philippa's face flushed and paled and her eyes flashed, for she hated giving information about the men amongst whom she lived, since it seemed like spying. Yet here in this crisis she might help. For it could not possibly be that Michael would misunderstand as an ordinary employer would.

"He's got brain," she said, speaking quickly, "he's strung up, like the men of the north. He isn't West country at all, more fiery, more keen, like a Frenchman."

"Socialist, of course."

"Oh, yes. Adult suffrage, land nationalisation, the means of production for the worker. Attacks Indian misgovernment and rails at a new assessment of land values, because it will drive the rents up in the slum tenements."

"I see," said Michael.

"If he'd been sacked six months ago we shouldn't have had this hullaballoo," growled Edwards. He resented women's presence—save, of course, in a kitchen—and the girls of the lacquering shop scratched pencil caricatures of him on the walls with an ass's head surmounting his broken bowler and the foot-note, Hee-haw, hee-haw, to point the moral.

"There's a reason for it all. The world's black to him," went on Philippa unmoved, "his wife is childless and she's taken to drink. At night when he's out at the street corners speaking, she's often at home in a drunken stupor."

"Ay, that's Parkyn," assented Edwards. "'Tis the woman that's druv him to it."

"Hush, here he is," said Michael quickly.

The long, pallid, hatchet-face of the man who entered, with its narrow, domed head and fierce eyes, was of the type that, common once in the meeting houses of the hot-gospellers, is now more often to be found in the arena of political strife. At every tariff reform or franchise meeting in the town, Parkyn's was always the first face to appear, rising like a wan luminary above the crowded benches as soon as question time was announced. The man of his stamp, in days gone-by a theologian, is usually nowadays a fiery socialist who is as anxious for the enfranchisement of his black brother as ever was his prototype of the past for the damnation of the atheist. He may almost be regarded as the emergent type of his class, for there never was a time when the air of political and social life was more tense than it is at present. The twentieth century may not be a great one, but it is certainly fiercely wide awake and strung in all directions by the electric call of new ideas, social, political, and even religious. Of the supine inertia of the Englishman of which we used to hear so much, there is scarcely a trace to be found now in the two struggling, uprising masses—those whose footing among the bourgeois is unsafe and those who are emerging at the top of the industrials.

"Parkyn," said Michael, "I want a word with you." He made a sign to Philippa Halliday, who disappeared, reluctantly followed by Edwards.

"You know," continued Strode as soon as they were alone, "that this bonus money which the men wish to withdraw, instead of leaving it in the business, was intended by me to be the first step towards making the men shareholders and ultimately owners."

"It's the wrong way," blazed Parkyn fiercely, "co-partnership's never offered by any master unless it's to

save himself. There's always something at the back of a move like what that is. Look at——"

Michael stopped him.

"Wait!" he exclaimed. "Stick to my case. What's my ulterior motive, do you think, in sharing the rising tide of prosperity with my men?"

"You know it isn't going to last. You've done good business with the penny-in-the-slot machine you took out a patent for, but you'll come to the end of that some time. You're getting ready for a rainy day."

"Come now, Parkyn, doesn't your notion seem a bit far-fetched?"

"Anyhow, I don't hold with co-partnership. How'll it help unemployment? Just you tell me that. Co-operation's only just a way of shutting the worker's mouth, a sop to him. It's a religion, and religion's always been nothing but a way to keep the workers satisfied with being slaves. Now, what I say is——"

"Yes, I know what you say. And I don't agree with it. We're at odds there. But do you think you're playing fair by staying here making trouble for me—in my Works?"

"In your Works! Why, you said just now they was to be the men's."

"They're not yet."

"No, nor ever will be. Just what I've always said."

"Parkyn," said Michael angrily, "do you deny that you're setting yourself against me?"

"No, I don't."

"And yet you know I could break you. For if I let it get out why you were sacked, there wouldn't be many jobs for you in these parts."

There was silence for a minute, then Parkyn turned away with a quick, angry gesture. He felt like a horse with the feel of the bit between his teeth. Then he fell back on the fighting power of his Union, but Michael went on:

"I'm not going to do it. Not at least if you pledge yourself not to speak a word of propagandist Socialism—or any other sort of propaganda—inside the foundry. What you do and say outside is no business of mine, any more than it's yours what *I* do or say. But your position's a mad bit of folly, for if the law-makers won't give you England to-

morrow, why should you object to somebody giving you and your mates a foundry? It's a bit absurd, isn't it? Half a loaf's better than no bread."

"Co-operation! a new way of 'teaching the working classes thrift!'"

"You're rather a sour fellow, aren't you?" said Michael, suddenly changing his tone. "And you don't do me the elementary justice of allowing me the honesty of my own convictions. Now, can you name a single employer who wouldn't sack you for your goings on?"

"No," said Parkyn, "I can't. But where your little game comes in is what I should like to know."

"I'll tell you. I want to see my will carried out. And not all the orators in existence are going to stop it. Go home and think that over."

At the flash of bitterness across the man's face Michael remembered what Philippa Halliday had told him about that home.

"We're both outside the same Jericho, you and I, Parkyn," he said quietly. "You say the walls will go down at the trumpet of socialism and I say it'll come down with a blow from the pick-axe of co-operation. Don't let's fight one another."

He held out his hand and the man took it half sullenly. Then in the doorway be turned and said: "It *seems* straight enough."

"And it is," answered Michael, but he had to remind himself forcibly of the centuries of exploitation that had bred this attitude of distrust. Even then, being rasped and irritated, he found it necessary to turn his mind to something more pleasing.

This, as always at that date, was the subject of the opening up of the canal that runs its course of six miles from Exminster to the sea. Built in 1560, it is the oldest canal in the British Isles and cost from first to last about three-quarters of a million of money, but now stands useless, its banks falling in and its bed so silted up that a vessel drawing over eleven feet has to unload at the entrance and send up its cargo in lighters. To manœuvre a great future for such a derelict object as this was to Michael the very crown of his hopes, though to many of his colleagues the idea looked like

that strain of madness which haunts constructive brains. It was, argued Michael, the invention of the paddle-wheel steamer with its heavy "wash" that ruined the canal, but the introduction of the screw steamer removed this disability and the opening of the Teign Valley granite quarries gave what Exminster had waited for during ninety years—a return cargo outward bound, to be carried in the vessels that fed the foundry with iron and coal. Again and again he went over the calculations concerning outlay for the dredging, cutting corners, enlargement of the basin and widening at the entrance which his scheme would necessitate. It gave him a thrill even to see the canal in these days, when he was very far away, indeed, from being in a position to put his hand on the capital needed for this, the corner-stone of his work, this which would not only make the Phoenix Works independent of railways, but would open out for the whole city a commercial future which it could gain by no other means.

With the winds of effort blowing about his ears from every corner of the globe, Michael inserted his key in the latch of the grey Georgian house which was his home.

"Michael," said Elise, rustling down the hall, "you must be quick if we're to get to the Dinhams' in time. You know we're dining there to-night."

She was as excited as a child at the rare pleasure of a dinner-party in one of the houses on the hill.

"Wasn't it nice to see Louis Aviolet again? And, oh, Michael, what shall we give them for a wedding present? I came in and found them here together; they had broken into the house by the dining-room window. For I'd sent Kate away for gross impertinence this morning. You know I always *did* suspect her of stealing my lace handkerchiefs. Then I went out to the registry office and I shut Ned in."

"Left Ned alone?"

"Oh, don't be cross. I've had a horrid day."

"I naturally want to know what has happened."

"Well, I'm telling you. I was only able to get an old woman to come in for the time. I thought it wouldn't matter that she can't cook, as we're dining out to-night. But I really must go up and finish dressing, for this atmosphere of domesticity is too oppressive for words."

From her room Elise heard her husband speaking through the telephone, but being too much engrossed in noting the effect of hair dressed low on the neck, she speedily forgot the fact. At last, sweeping across the landing, she opened the boy's door. As she stood by his cot there passed over her brilliant face a sudden softness, like the shadow that cools the noonday heat, and bending down, from a woman armed cap-à-pie, she became for the moment a girl with her first-born, while in the close contact of the child's body she could feel his warmth and the soft tickle of his breath on her bare neck. She held her arms round him as he curled closer to her and smiled in his sleep.

"There," she said as she straightened herself, "a bad mother, am I? Ned knows better." She wore the triumphant air of an all-conquering woman as she went lightly down the stairs.

At the sight of her husband bending over papers and still in morning dress, she exclaimed: "Why, you're not dressed. Oh, do be quick. We ought to have started ten minutes ago."

"I've just telephoned to Dinham to say we're not going."

"Not going?"

"No, how could we possibly leave the boy with only a strange woman in the house. He's nervous and white-faced and if he woke up——"

"Oh, but that's nonsense. I'll tell her to go up and see him and to keep the kitchen door open in case he calls."

"We can't go, Elise. I'm sorry for your disappointment, but why you can't manage your servants as well as I manage my men, I can't see."

She stood still for a moment, her face hardening. Then going up to him, she held out her cloak.

"Put it round me, please," she said quietly.

"What do you mean, Elise? I've just said that we're not going."

"And I," she answered, turning towards the telephone on his desk, "am going to say that it's a mistake."

He caught her hand as she raised it towards the receiver. "You can't do that," he said roughly. "They'll think we are mad."

"And so we are!" she cried, sinking into a chair, as though at his touch some spring had relaxed in her.

Slowly unclasping the bracelet from her arm, she played with the long, snaky coil of gold, rolling and unrolling it. The glint of hair, the eyes with their dark lashes, the red lips were the sole points of colour on her dead white face. With the heaving of her breast the peachy tints of her gown ran into shivering lines of colour. All the time she knew that it was the sight of Aviolet which had brought on this fit of misery in her: she had been quiet for so long that now the consciousness of how life was passing by with all its gifts withheld was a maddening goad to her brain.

"Why are you behaving like this?" asked Michael, feeling more need to repress anger than he had with his men's childishness. "I'm asking nothing more than is reasonable—that you should care for your own child."

"Care for him! You think I don't care for him?"

He made a gesture of annoyance. "Oh, don't let's go into that," he exclaimed.

"He's all there is for me to care for. Michael," she whispered in a half panic, "you don't understand. I want to tell you. Every day I get up to the same thing—the noise of the foundry. My God, how I hate it! And you go and I'm alone all day. Then, after I've done my shopping and come in again, I open the front door and stand looking in. It's always the same. Sometimes for days and days there's not even a letter for me. I feel trapped."

"And the boy?"

"Soon I shall lose him too. He'll go out there in a few years," she pointed to the works that stretched to the very wall of the garden, "and he'll be swallowed up as you have been. It would have been different if my girlie had lived."

The break in her voice spoke for her sincerity. At the birth of her last child she had almost died with it and they both knew that there could be no more children.

Michael pulled her up to him.

"What can I do, Elise, to make you happier?" he said. "My dear, no one could be sorrier than I about your disappointment. And if I've seemed careless, it's only because I've had a fearful strain upon me. First, Clatworthy's death and the struggle with his grasping executors, and then the building of the new shops. My dear one, I know your life is empty. Didn't I want you to come and help me, to

give me your business abilities? A woman can like work as well as a man. Just look at Philippa Halliday."

"Oh, she's another class. Besides, she's in love with you."

"Elise, don't talk nonsense."

"Well, if she isn't, she's a monster. For why does she toil early and late unless she likes to do it? Women like Philippa are made for that sort of thing, anyway."

"What is it you want, Elise?" he asked sternly.

"To leave this house, for one thing. See, I've got a pile of agents' catalogues. Let's take a house on the hill. I'm sure people would like us, people who would never come down to this hole. And I can pay for it with my own money, since I don't spend half the interest you pay so regularly into my banking account. Oh, Michael, do let's, and not live any more like poor people."

"Didn't we agree to that when we married?"

"I never meant to keep to it," she said frankly. "But before Ned was born I was too ill to bother. Then came my girlie's loss. Oh, it's been a wretched, wretched time. I'm full of life and you keep me here. I hate grubby men and slatternly women. To live here makes me feel dirty. Your mother says there are people of the sunlight and people of the shade. I won't be kept out of my sunlight any more."

Sobbing, she subsided into a chair while Michael, wildly ruffling his hair, looked as helpless as though asked to grasp a hurricane by its tail. Much harassed, he began to seek eagerly for the most telling way of putting his case. At last he brought her a curious book of French prints, depicting with the masterly skill of French draughtsmanship a series of imaginary views of Christ in modern life—received at a railway station, fêted at dinner-parties, shown the precious jewels of a Cathedral treasury and finally shaking off the dust of social and ecclesiastical hypocrisy, herding with outcasts under an archway and being fined in the law-courts.

Elise's artistic sense was captivated, but her religious propriety scandalised.

"What has it to do with us, anyway?" she asked, wrinkling her brows perplexedly, yet with a delightful apprecia-

tion of the interest Michael was taking in her mental affairs.

"This is my Bible, Elise," he answered, striking the 50-centime brochure marked, "Par Vogel."

"Here," he continued, turning over the first pages, "is the religion of comfort, the making the best of both worlds that is practised by all the first people from bishops downwards. Never go without a meal, or a bed, or a dress, or a picture, but preach, genuflect, go to every service—and feel comfortably safe from hell and the contact with poverty. The outcasts have fleas and the labouring men are ungrateful; yet always from comfortable parsonages proclaim the religion of the *bon sans-culotte* Jesus. Elise, you have brain-stuff enough to see the folly of it all."

"But, Michael, such good manners they have! I like them—and the *bon sans-culotte*, as you call Him, is nothing to you. He died and was buried nearly nineteen hundred years ago, that's all."

"Yet—He spoke the truth. He was one of the few that have ever done so. I will not be a knave and profess one thing and live another. I will not live in a desirable family mansion and ape the ways of hypocrites. Still less will I let my son be brought up to do so."

"Yet you love to see me fine."

"Ah, my dear," he answered with a rueful smile, "you're my Eve, my one bit of extravagance. Yet you're lovelier to me in a plain white gown than in all this."

She slipped a finger inside the neck of his flannel shirt.

"But," she said sadly, "it isn't my *milieu*, all this."

"Ah, Elise, but anyway it's honest, this poverty. If your love were perfect, you'd never wish for anything but my way."

"Yet I cannot be an echo, or a shadow, even though I am a woman," she said sadly.

It was hopeless and he shrugged his shoulders, remembering the rage she had fallen into when he dismissed a maid for frightening the boy with bogey tales, although she could dress Elise's hair divinely.

It was a relief to hear Ned's voice, calling out in night-fear, for the boy was given to such attacks, being the high strung child of the two extremes who had met to produce

him. At such times his cot was removed to his mother's room so that, if his terrors returned, he might have the comfort of her nearness.

Lying in the darkness a few hours later, Elise could hear nothing but the tapping of the blind against the window-pane. She had been asleep for a few minutes, but now came a confused sense of sudden awakening. Turning towards the boy's cot, she saw her husband bending over it.

"What in the world are you doing, Michael?" she exclaimed.

"Taking him to his own room. There's no need for him to sleep here to-night."

It was a real delight to Elise to see the ease with which he carried the cot and the sleeping child out of the room and across the landing to the nursery. Lying there in her cosy nest, she watched him with bright eyes as he switched off the light and crossed the room. Then she felt him stoop over her and lifting her right up against his breast, he carried her across the room to the window.

"Michael, Michael," she whispered, clinging to him in a panic, "what are you going to do?"

She feared at first that he was sleep-walking, but his rough breathing was not that of a sleeper.

Pulling the lace curtains aside roughly, so that he tore a great strip of them loose from the rail, he held her up till, in the puff of wind that waved among the laces at her breast, she could see the dim, low outlines of the buildings she hated so.

"Look," he said, shaking her slightly as he held her, like a naughty child, "look, out there's my foundry and in here's my wife." He shook her again and then caught her so tightly in his great strength that she could scarcely breathe. "Do you think I'm going to lose either?" he whispered. "No, no, the foundry's mine and you're my wife. Both mine, to do what I like with!"

Half-laughing in joy at his strength, half-shrinking from the suppressed anger she felt under all his passionate grip of her, she cried:

"Michael, you do, do care for me, don't you?"

Holding her still, he said, carrying her across the room: "I'm your man, Elise, and if that means nothing to you, it does to me. You're mine, to do what I like with."

"But, after all," she laughed against his face, "I'm your partner and you can't take your business partner and squeeze the life out of her, till she does what you like. You can't, really. Not nowadays."

"Look, look," he said, lifting her up again on his shoulder till she sat there like a child, "look out of the window. That's my foundry, not yours. And I shall do what I like with it, just as I do with you, you jade, you mischievous little temptress."

And, as he held her cold feet in his hands as though she were a baby, she looked down on his flushed face and stooped with her mouth to his:

"Oh, Michael," she cried, "I do love you like this, ever so. Oh, Michael, you dear, you dear."

But later on, when he was asleep, she curled over with her cheek on her hand and wondered how long it would be possible to live as they were doing, for it would surely be very dull again. Yet, after all, to-night she was the centre of things and the foundry seemed to belong to some remote pre-historic age. It was scarcely possible to believe that the grim dawn would bring the whistle and roar of it once more.

But in the morning Michael went back to bonus problems and to canal construction questions till Philippa Halliday felt her nerves strung to breaking point by the electric tension of unease at the works and Elise began to scorn herself for allowing a mere outburst of passion to blind her to the fact that it was her money, after all, that kept Michael afloat.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRING LINE

ONE morning, four months later, Michael stood looking down with angry eyes at the rustling sheet of the Exminster *Clarion* which he held pinned to the desk beneath his outspread palm. The precious Johnsonian phrases of the editor echoed in his brain like stinging gad-flies, for it appeared that he, Michael Strode, had "polluted the purity of municipal life," a purity which is always particularly virginal on the eve of an election.

"It's almost a case for a libel action, if one were foolish enough to bring it," he exclaimed, as he pushed the paper towards Philippa Halliday. Sinking back in his chair, he tapped his crossed leg savagely against the side of the desk.

The men in whose names the bonus money had accumulated being persistent in their demands that the many thousands of pounds due to them should be paid out in the form of ready money, the resources of the Phoenix Works were now so much the poorer for their payment and the bookmakers so much the richer.

It appeared also that, in the *Clarion's* opinion, Michael was so much the poorer in reputation, since this "dole" was clearly a move on his part to procure the men's votes for the political candidate on whose behalf he happened to have made two speeches. Here, therefore, he found himself offered up as a spicy condiment to the watery roast of local banality. It was the more annoying, inasmuch as he took special pride in holding himself aloof from town affairs. For him, therefore, to be charged with chicanery was monstrous, since it is difficult to be a pachyderm in the interests of a cause one despises.

Philippa wondered how this event would affect his actions with respect to the Works.

"Tell you what it is," said Michael, "I've never truckled enough to their local cliques and now they'll all join in hounding me down. To-morrow the *Herald* will have me out."

"What shall you do?"

"Nothing. What is there to do? I can't prove I've got a set of damned ungrateful fools to deal with and that the money was promised before this by-election was sprung on us."

It is the popular cry, that "ungrateful," and Philippa, who had never heard him adopt the tone before, felt how difficult it is to eradicate class instinct. In a fit of anger it comes out immediately.

Michael sat glooming, while the roar of the foundry stole into the room, bringing peace, for, like a woman who has made the winning of herself the prize of hard effort, these iron-works were dear, precisely because they had exacted heavy toll of patient labour. Now, drawing nearer every day to an assured position, as he opened orders week by week that he knew had been wrested from North country rivals by sheer force of fine workmanship, of quick anticipation of customers' needs, he felt a sort of horror at the idea of giving up so fine a bantling into the hands of men who forced from him every concession they possibly could, who doubted motives and mistrusted acts dictated by the simplest good-will. It was like giving a petted child to a hireling who would make a slave of it.

It was in vain that he tried to realise that this attitude of distrust and childishness on the men's part was merely the fruit of capitalistic strife. For to transform the platitude of a generalisation into the sympathy that bears and forbears was impossible at the present juncture, stung as he was on both sides, by the press and by the men he employed.

Late in the afternoon he entered the office where Philippa was typing letters and flinging himself down, said:

"I've sacked the men there's been this bother about in the fitting shop."

He had been annoyed the day before by the colossal tactlessness of a trade union secretary and now tightening her lips she gazed in dismay at an act on his part that might

be, in the inflammable state of the men's tempers, a spark to explode the fire-damp.

Crossing the room, she closed the door he had left open, and coming back to the desk, rested her hand on the bar of it.

"There'll be trouble," she said quietly.

"Then there must be," he answered doggedly. "I'm already paying higher wages and working on a time-sheet incomparably more advantageous to the men than in any other firm in the West of England. This demand of the fitters is the last turn of the screw."

"The other men side with them and besides——"

"Well, speak out."

"Yes, I ought to have before, but I didn't like to be—what they seem to think I am."

"What's that?"

"A spy. Isn't it natural that they should feel I know everything on their side and report it all to you? It's been a mistake employing me at all. I see that, now it's too late. I'd better go."

"You'll do nothing of the sort. Hang it all, do you think I'm the man to let these fellows choose my secretary for me? Without your knowledge of the ropes, where do you think a new hand, such as I was to begin with, would have been? If it's salary you want, I'll double it, right away."

In his anger, he drew out his cheque book, though, of course, the pay sheet was in Durant's charge.

"Stop," she cried, with a smile at his impetuosity, "you know it's not salary that I want. It's to prevent your running your head into a wasps' nest. Don't, for God's sake, put yourself in the wrong now. Bowden's works are beginning at half-past seven, instead of six in the morning, and it's generally known they'll take more hands on."

"Yes, half-past seven—and no breakfast time. Only to speed up a bit more, that's the meaning of a change like that."

Between Bowden's and the Phoenix Works there was a feud that, Homeric now in its proportions, had started originally over a new sewer-trap. In Michael's pattern shop an original design had been made for which he had

taken out a patent and the rival firm had indubitably copied it with alterations important enough to escape the meshes of the Patents Act. In this case the perfidy was obvious, for the bosses of the trap had been made with coffin nails, one of which in Michael's plan had been accidentally broken and was accurately reproduced in its split condition, not only in the Phoenix model, but in the Bowden replica as well.

"So," he said more calmly, "Bowden is playing the willing Barkis then and the men talk of coming out over this late start question?"

"Yes." Philippa's tightly pinched lips showed the bitterness she felt at having to turn informer. The fact that she did it for the sake of both sides made it none the less distasteful.

"What's the bottom of it all, though, Philippa?" he asked.

"Well, you see, you talked big when you started about profit-sharing and that. They say that was all bunkum. That you never intended to do it and that even your serving your time with Clatworthy was only just to find out how to put the screw on tighter."

"Oh." With lips thread-like, but firm, Michael sat with his big hands planted on his knees. "And the bonus money? What about that?"

She was silent.

"What they say here, I suppose." He struck the *Clarion* sheet.

She nodded.

"What'll they come out on?" he asked curtly after a pause.

"To make you take these men back, to knock off an hour and a half in the morning and trade-union wages in every shop."

"A thorough, all-round programme," he said grimly. "Well, they can come out, and—we'll see who's the better man."

He balanced a ruler lightly at the end of his square fingers as he spoke. The feeling that had been a hidden spring of bitterness in his mind during the last weeks had welled up now and he felt the taste of it in his mouth. It was the sense that he must either master these men or be for ever

under their thumb. They must be made to feel that he was the possessor of that grit which, more than talent or even energy, is the basis of a successful business life. Reaching down to the right-hand drawer of his desk he took out a sheaf of folios. It was the bond of co-partnership on which he had been working with his solicitors for the last two months. Turning over the pages, he glanced at the clauses, based on the masterly ideas of André Godin, the protagonist of productive co-operation. To capital was secured interest at four per cent; to invention, a reward; to social helplessness, insurance; to management, enough payment to secure the highest talent; to reserve and depreciation, a sufficiency to keep the foundry in a healthy condition, and to labour, enough to make the workers ultimately the actual owners. It was, in short, a measure, not of philanthropy, but of justice and a scientifically balanced instrument of economic equipoise. The vital question now was whether it was possible to set this vast machine of co-operation in action, if the men regarded him, by whom it must be guided during the first years, as a man of straw.

"You mean to fight, then?" asked Philippa, with a dark flush that dyed even her neck. "So, that's the end of it all!"

"I know," he said lamely, "your devotion to the cause we both have at heart."

"Oh, don't talk like that!" she exclaimed, as fixing her heels firmly she stood eyeing him up and down. "What you want to do is to wring their necks, the necks of working men, the first minute they stand up to you. Scratch you and you're only the master, after all, for all your talk of brotherhood and all the rest of the patter."

Like Michael, Philippa had gone back to the old class hatred that is deeper than anything except death; she might have been Parkyn, the demagogue, himself.

The noises outside, the continual whirl of machinery in which they always worked, sounded far away in the thud of their own heart-beats. Philippa could not keep silence.

"You'll use what I've told you against them, too. I'm what they've said I am. My God, that it should come to this!"

In the very moment of his indecision, Michael felt contemptuous of the violence of language she allowed herself to use. Then, putting a constraint on himself, he said:

"That's absurd and you know it. And as to making myself top-dog—. Well, if you must have it, that's just what I've got to do. They can't dictate and that they've got to learn. Men never work together better than when they've wrestled to a fall."

"This isn't prize-fighting, it's war, and you said yourself that people never shake hands as friends after real war."

"That was said in my salad days," said Michael, heartily wishing, and not for the first time, that he had never perpetrated that piece of highfalutin.

"It was said when you were something different from a master that spends his time besting men—and letting them know it," panted Philippa.

"Wait," he said, holding up a hand, "let's get our breaths a bit after this shindy."

While he switched on the light and went to order tea from the engineers' dining-rooms next door, Philippa sat bitterly reproaching herself for her own wild words. She felt herself now the Bar-Lass of this savage onslaught; on her rested the well-being of more than the Phoenix Works. Biting her nail to the quick, she sat fighting for self-mastery and wisdom, while her master poured out the tea and set a big cup at her elbow. Then, trembling and dry-lipped, she gulped it down, while the only noise in the room was the sound of the clinking tea-cups and the eating and drinking that always makes so queer an interlude on a battle-field.

"Look," said Philippa, making a last effort, "look at the orders there. Can you afford a strike now? Think of what it'll cost you."

"That's my affair," he answered curtly. She harped his fears aright, but it is the wrong line to take with an obstinate man to remind him of his own interests, when he is bent on beating his brains out against them.

"You're in full flood now," she persisted, "but you'll be on the rocks, even if you win."

There is nothing in the world that aims more surely between the joints of a man's armour than the voice that puts his own apprehensions into concrete form.

Suddenly, close-shut as they were with the windows of the room high up in the wall, they became aware that something unusual was going on in the foundry. A roar went up and at the sound the clerks in the office opposite crowded to the windows of their house. In a stride or two Michael was across the yard and in the casting-shed, where the men had been cleaning the blast-furnace.

In the gloom of late afternoon, through the murky reek of the place, deep in black sand and stinking with sulphur fumes, the upright cylinders of the furnace looked like the pillars of some dim Egyptian temple. There was a strange silence save where the overhead crane, jibbing to and fro in a St. Vitus's dance of checked speed, jarred and creaked with ear-splitting laughter. Making a sign to the driver to stop it, Michael pushed his way through the crowd that had gathered at the mouth of the furnace.

"Sixty pounds of slag on his head, and more, sir," explained the foreman, who was bending over the man on the ground, round whom the surging mass seethed and struggled. Sickly grey were the faces that bent above the head from which oozed patches of blood against the grizzled hair. The men made way like frightened children for Philippa as, strangely slim below the waist, she knelt at the side of the injured man. It was not the first accident she had seen and she had waited to get brandy before she left the office. Now pushing under his head the skirt she had slipped off in a dim corner, she put the brandy to his lips. It trickled off, but between the gap-toothed jaws she forced an entrance after a while.

At last the ambulance litter came and, directed by Michael, they got him on it, unconscious and groaning slightly. Just then, panting and white-faced, came a woman, her wisp of grizzled hair bobbing like a rabbit's scut in the hurry of her thudding footsteps and hammering heart.

"No, no," said Philippa, putting her arm round the poor creature, "Jim's not dead, my dear, not dead."

When Philippa came back from the hospital to the office she waited, trembling with the nervous shock and wiping her face with blood-stained hands. It was more of the six children than of anyone else that she thought, for of the

working world as she was, she knew the toll that labour takes of young life, a toll for all the compensation acts, only a shade less cruel than that demanded by osprey-plucking or seal-driving.

"I shan't fight," said Michael, as an hour later he signed the last letter, "not if there's a shred of reason left in the men. This isn't a world where one can play with the lives of men and women for the sake of a bit of silly pride."

He could not express it, but Philippa knew what he felt, for in the face of such deadly risks as these men run every day the injury that comes of the elements is so unswerving that mere human malice seems but pigmy spite. Nor is there ever an occasion when compensation is paid less grudgingly than in the case of a fatal accident to a workman. Yet drama is cruel, after all, for in the excitement of the accident, the hands themselves lost sight of the grievances of the men whom Michael had dismissed, in the more immediately poignant drama of sixty pounds of slag on a cleaner's pate.

CHAPTER IV

SILKEN DALLIANCE

"So that," said Louis Aviolet, nodding towards Elise as he sat down by Mrs. Strode, "is the radiant thing that our friend Michael wants to turn into a hod-carrier."

The occasion was that of a political dance in the Southernhay Assembly Rooms and just at the moment the candidate was leading out Michael's wife, all sails scudding gallantly before the wind. It was a pretty spectacle in which the onlookers were privileged to behold one of the rarest sights in the world—a human being in the surroundings for which Nature intended it. For the greatest human crime is the tactlessness of forcing round pegs into square holes, so that, not content with giving human beings their wrong framework, we spend centuries in transforming wildcats into fireside purrers, only in order that they may turn our back gardens into jungle fastnesses.

To-night, in the glare of eyes and electric clusters, Elise gripped the situation, not anxiously as a general visualises a battle-field, but half-carelessly, with the ease of a master, holding the ring as she paced the room or swam lightly through the sea of dancers on the arm of her temporarily beatified partner. It was a display of sleight of body, for she made others see her as she saw herself. Saturated with the light and colour of the moment, she shone luminous like a planetary body.

"She's straining at the leash," said Mrs. Strode. "For Michael is just his father over again. He has never 'doubled Seraglio Point,' any more than if he lived in the twelfth century. He thinks, you know, that a woman should stay just where he puts her, till he wants her again. Only Michael never troubles to gild the cage, as they did in the wise old days. The temerity of man is so amazing."

"Would a gilded cage satisfy that bird, d'you think?"

"Not now. It might have once. Now she's for the foot-lights, you know, and what's worse, she feels herself something of a personality."

"A fatal mistake for any woman."

"Yes," said Mrs. Strode drily, "I suppose it is. The world, that is, husbands, want wives, not personalities. She longs to stretch her wings, that's plain. We of the old days clipped our own wings, you know. Things are much more difficult now to adjust than ever they were. It does me good to see you and Cecily. For you, my dear friend, are doomed to be one of the unrecorded. You'll never make history in your marriage, you two. Thank God, neither of you is unfortunate enough to take long views, for people who do that are always treading on things at their feet."

Across the room, over the head of the callow youth with whom she was dancing, Cecily's eyes met Aviolet's. They were just back from their honeymoon.

"Yes," he said confidently, "I think I shall be able to make Cis happy. And what finer task can there be than to make a woman happy? It's worth all the battles that ever were fought and all the laws that ever were passed."

"Well," said Mrs. Strode, in the brisk tones she used when she smelt sentiment, "you've been dyeing your hands in women's heart-blood in goodness knows how many books, so, I take it, it's time you made some atonement."

The block of men that had gathered round Elise at the end of the dance began to melt, satisfied with the largess she had given them, for wherever her silver gown flashed there were gathered the black crows together. Then, as she passed close to Mrs. Strode and Aviolet, on the arm of a willowy, olive-faced man with microscopically-peering eyes, they heard her say:

"Oh, yes, conscience, indeed! Conscience is the maker of more bores than anything else in the world."

"No," said her partner, "you're wrong. A bore's only the man you've no use for. Conscience makes saints, and the saint amuses me. I examine him."

"That's Dr. Lemprière," remarked Aviolet, as the two passed out of sight. "From Jersey, like herself. I know him, a fine surgeon, they say, and a man on the make."

"They were referring to Michael," said Mrs. Strode, her

lips tightening. "He's often at their house, that Dr. Lemprière. Look! they're going in to supper together. Elise is a wise woman. She always says he manages to get the best of everything."

"I recognise the type," said Aviolet. "Shall we not go, too, for Cis told me not to speak to her to-night? Let me see if I can rival Lemprière at the commissariat."

From their corner of the supper-room Mrs. Strode and Aviolet could see the end of the room where the laughter was loudest, the press thickest. The centre of the group was Elise and to her needs attendant males ministered, taking the work of purveyor out of the hands of Dr. Lemprière.

"Yet she has a conscience," said Mrs. Strode, in answer to an unspoken remark in her own mind, as she watched, "though it was at Michael they were both laughing. He was the saint they meant."

"Well, why not, dear lady?" asked Aviolet. "And as for conscience, it ought to be considered just as indecent for a woman to make a naked display of conscience as of lingerie. The faint flutter of suggested frills is alluring. So is a scruple half-withdrawn. More is barbarous."

"That," twinkled Mrs. Strode, "is one of the little speeches that should be barred in your domestic life, if you value the peace of it. Yet, what a subject for the present occasion!"

"And why not conscience in a ball-room? or Schopenhauer at a funeral? It is in inappositeness that there lies the zest of things. What can be jollier than naughty talk under a bishop's nose?"

"Nothing, except *with* a bishop," said Mrs. Strode drily.

As she looked at him gently, with her head on one side, Mrs. Strode was inclined to think that her friendship with Louis Aviolet was the pleasantest relationship she had ever enjoyed in her life. For a parent's love is shadowed with anxiety and a lover's dearness with the pangs of jealousy, but between these two there was no claim that sympathy could not fully satisfy.

They sat silent for a moment, thinking, as they usually did when they were together, of Michael, for, after all, even with the best will in the world towards taking things easy,

the most difficult task of all is to ignore your Puritan, the char-woman of the soul, as Louis somewhere calls him, the char-woman who sets the teeth on edge with the rigidity of her holy-stone and the grit of her chapped handling of the floor-cloth. That the puritanism of Michael was social and not religious made his case none the less trying, for every age has the Puritan it deserves, and the scientific one of to-day is ten degrees worse than the sour-visaged, long-haired knave in the grey jerkin with his sword of the Lord and a swingeing prayer to back it up with. Nowadays the little finger of the scientist is thicker than the loin of the theologian and the physical science that cuts living animals to pieces is matched by the political science that makes it difficult for an imaginative man to sleep o' nights, for dreams of the outcasts who ought to have his bed, and of the eider-ducks who ought to wear his quilt. Michael was a victim of what Aviolet called *cacoëthes dolorem patiendi*, the disease of the century, now that the hungry eyes round the loaded table of life are the winged harpies that snatch the joy from it.

"Come, let's have a turn," said Mrs. Strode to Aviolet, as they re-entered the half-empty ballroom. "Why shouldn't I dance? I've done it all my life when I got the chance."

But she was soon tired and a little irritated at her quick fatigue.

"You dance like a Frenchman," she said tartly, as they paused. "Very wiry, very."

"Look," said Aviolet suddenly, "there's Michael in the doorway."

Many turned to watch as his big figure filled the entrance for a moment against the purple curtains. In the bright light his face looked tired and grey at first, till it suddenly flashed into life, and the heads of the watchers looked round to see the cause of this change. It was Elise who, queenly in the sway of her going, seemed to open a way for herself to him by the magic of her face and outstretched hands. At the moment when they met, one breathed again, as though she had performed some feat of skill.

"It was only a Frenchwoman," said the great man of the hour to his partner, "who could have fluttered down the room like that. She's an uncommon fine creature."

"She's only Jersey," sneered the lady, "and of quite low origin."

The man smiled discreet dissent over the lady's head, while Elise, before the laughing protests of her deserted partner, allowed her husband to whirl her off into the midst of the swaying couples.

"Ah, Michael," she whispered, "we haven't danced together since our marriage. Do you remember the swans and the *Blue Danube* that night by the river?"

Over her bowed head, through the thrilling of the violins and the thrumming of the piano, there came to Michael that incomparable song of battle, the wind among the aspens. In tune together for once, they waltzed till the room thinned and the lights grew dusty, lost to all but the joy of living and breathing together. Dancing to-night against the background of pictures of moorland gloom and sunshine that line the Assembly Rooms, they seemed to see the widening vistas of life stretching on in a glory of conquest. At the back of it to Elise was her charm, and to Michael the dusty roar of the ironmaster's world. Yet both were at one with the same emotional thrill; it was not until dividing thought stepped in that they felt disunion.

"How divinely they dance," said the pretty youngling, all smiles and dimples, who had taken Mrs. Strode's place on Aviolet's arm. "Yet they live in some horrid little hole, though they might have motors and ballrooms. He must be very eccentric."

"To be an eccentric," said Louis sententiously, "isn't it to see things as they actually are, flying round, head in space, with toes miraculously fastened to the earth? That's why eccentrics make one giddy, I suppose."

Looking at Miss Chamberlain's rosy, awe-stricken face, Louis recognised his own cruelty in hurling speeches at her that Mrs. Strode might have appreciated, for now there were in her bright eyes, not one incomprehensible, in the words of the Athanasian creed, but two incomprehensibles —Michael Strode and Louis Aviolet.

In the carriage on the way home Elise slipped her hand into her husband's, as she lay back against him.

"Why," whispered she, "are you not always as you were to-night?"

In her soft weariness of tired bliss she was swaying on the topmost boughs of the tree, but presently came with a tumble to earth as the carriage drew up before a house in Ischa Street.

"What in the world are we stopping here for?" she asked in amazement.

"I must see Holman's wife to-night," he said, "you know he's the man who was injured last week. I've got good news from the hospital for her. Lemprière told me just now that he's out of danger for the time."

There was a light in the lower room and Michael knocked softly on the window-pane. In the wind the green branch of the elm tree tapped against the street lamp as he waited for the door to open. At last Philippa Halliday appeared against the lighted background of the room, which opened straight on the street.

"I've been sitting up with the youngest child," she said, nodding over her shoulder, "he's croupy and the mother isn't fit to tend him."

The window was open, but the poverty smell came in a whiff to his nostrils, and on the old sofa by the fire lay a huddled heap of clothes where the child slept. As he delivered his message, Philippa could see the gleam of silk and shimmering hair in the far corner of the carriage.

Home once more half an hour later, she stood looking down on her table littered with patterns and materials. For before she had gone to the Holmans' she had been busy with a new grey summer dress. Now, however, her face puckered in disgust, and she suddenly rolled patterns and materials together in a shapeless lump, tumbling them into the bottom drawer of the chest that stood, cottage fashion, against the wall of her living room.

"Heavens!" she exclaimed, "what's the good of all this to me?"

The beautiful dress of the woman in the carriage had struck her with a pang of envy. For men, who acquiesce so readily in their own ugliness that they presently forget it, never know the degradation that strikes a humbly dressed woman when she sees the bravery of another's plumes. What courage of forlorn hope against great odds has not

been wasted by the countless women who have fought fate with a knot of ribbon or a string of beads!

So hot was her fever of pettiness that Philippa blew out the light and stepped into the street. Some women have everything, she said to herself, as she thought of the blue-silk eider-down of Elise's nest that she had once seen when sent upstairs on an errand. Wandering down the road by the river, she asked herself for what will-o'-the-wisp had she cut herself off from the life of any class. Now, she was neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, and evenwhile she rejoiced to see the growth of a better feeling between Michael and his employés, she clenched her hand by her side as she felt the sting of class hatred in herself against Elise. Yet, was it class-hatred or sex-hatred? She could not tell, as she watched the river heaving against the quay and the street-lamp on the other side throwing its beams on the doors of the bonded warehouses cut out of the solid rock of the hill-side.

Philippa's mind went a strange journey, as she listened to the night wind, for to take the pilgrim's scrip and staff, you need not pack your luggage: to ask what you are really afraid of will suffice and the answer will take you into queerer places than any Orient express that ever thundered across Europe.

At last a dark shadow appeared, moving on the steps below the warehouses. She took it to be the heaving of a dog's back till she made out that it was the crouching figure of a woman. Jumping into the ferry-boat, she unmoored it quickly and swinging along by the rope, presently bumped against the steps. Her movements had been so quick that she was upon the girl almost before she had time to grow frightened. In the gas-light Philippa saw her heavily-fringed forehead, her furtive eyes and the long dress that hid burst boots. It was clear that she had been vainly trying to find courage for the last weapon against the cruelty of life.

"I couldn't," she said, as Philippa pulled her into the boat. "I hadn't the pluck. Though I dunno but that when it come on to morning and colder that I wouldn't have been able to give myself a flip over. But, by then, I reckon," she added drearily, "a copper would have nabbed me."

Philippa wasted no time, for the girl's teeth were chattering in her half-starved body. She had, as she put it, "a belly that stuck to the ribs."

"I couldn't do it. Not me!" said she, her mind going over and over again in a mill of repetition as maddening as the twirl of a prayer machine and as effective. In the blue vault of the sky the full moon overhead poised herself proudly complacent while little wisps of cloud floated away from her like faint breaths. Later on, while her guest slept, Philippa thought of the faint moon breaths as the sighs of human impotence. For what could be done for a girl like this? The child dead long ago, stifled at birth if lucky; the degradation of the streets; worst of all, the incapacity for steady labour. Philippa had tucked her up in bed and pushing back the fringe from the smooth forehead, had reflected that working women of that age are often lined and wrinkled.

In the morning Philippa came down, and as she had half expected, found her guest gone. She had washed and tidied herself and her room and found the front door key, but left no word. To Philippa now, in the calm consideration of the morning, the episode was not precisely sorrowful. She could consider it without the sob in the voice, called pathos; rather did she find it ironic, a comment on all masterful schemes for reforming the world. It had, in fact, the sting of that mental goad, which in its essentials is irony.

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN IN POSSESSION

It was in an old house a few doors above Snug Harbour that Cecily and Aviolet made their nest, a place of white walls and green fittings with rooms low, spacious, and cheerful with the broad light from the river and the wide view over the gracious opulence of a land that, with the tepid languor of its air and the rich stretches of its curving valleys, has something of the restfulness of Balzac's beloved Touraine. At least Aviolet loved to think so, for that magician of women's hearts whose name is Honoré was the master to whose work he turned most often for inspiration.

The top room of all, a wide palace of windows, was the one consecrated by Cecily as the workshop of her beloved. No one save herself was allowed to enter it to sweep and dust, one cannot say to tidy, for every paper was laid conscientiously where she found it, except on the floor. In the blue dusting apron of the housewife, Louis used to find her at work, almost holding her breath lest a sigh too deep should displace anything so precious as a typed sheet or a scrawl of notes on the back of an envelope. The room was kept bare and uncarpeted, as Louis liked it best, with for furniture, only the big table, a reading lamp, a few chairs, and the camp bed he had used in his Surrey tent pushed away in a corner. "Of course," Cecily would blushingly explain, "he never uses it." The solitary ornament of the place was the bronze jar of Bohemian memories, no longer filled with tea leaves and banana skins, but with pot-pourri made from Snug Harbour roses.

Among the many jarring notes of a world out of tune it is pleasant to record these wondrous good days, for, what was best of all, they changed but from one sweetness to another. All day Louis worked away upstairs, while Cecily, busy over tarts and curtains, waged fearful war on every noise from the street. Before the first month was out, barking curs learnt the fierceness of her onslaught and Aviolet's wedding

gift, the great Russian borzoi, "Baby," with his eyes full of the sorrow of the steppes, learnt to be so silent that he might have been a barkless dingo, instead of a kingly creature that, standing majestic or loping swift and stern, seemed to tread that other earth than ours whereon, in olden days, Tristram and Iseult rode pricking through primaeval woods, while the churls peeped sullenly through the oak glades.

At length, the door of the study would open and Cecily would hear her husband's voice calling her. That was the time for which she and the borzoi had been waiting all day, for if Aviolet had "made the day good," there would be a chapter to listen to, dog and woman curled up on the floor together. But if not, there was comradeship and sympathy among the three, so far removed from one another by ancestral descent. For, though as a maiden, Cecily had been like wall fruit with a tart flavour that calls for the sun-rays to sweeten it, now with widening life for her affections, and removed from all the fret of discontent at times so out of joint as ours, she had begun to acquire that savour of genial humour that was her mother's hidden gift to her. Now she was no longer the *âme bornée et bourgeoise*, but a soul gifted with the freedom of no mean city, that of life. And if unawares a little gnarl of narrow piety peeped forth at times, it was but a mole on a fair face and with something of the grace of a three-cornered patch next the lips. Besides, she was practically useful in Aviolet's trade, for there had been born in her a curious, back-handed method of criticism, so that whenever Aviolet read her a passage from his new romance *At the Sign of the Pomme d'Or*, and heard her say: "Yes, that's very clever," he knew that he had failed. She had become to him what the old woman was to Molière, and whatever savoured of cleverness to her he knew to be obscure, for everything else was greeted with the artist's true homage, laughter or tears. At first he had expected protests at his morality, but the fear proved groundless, after all, for like most orthodox folk it was only verbal frankness that annoyed her. Although she was no disciple of the *mot juste* and would expend immense energy in persuading him to delete a biblical phrase, an open vision of an unconventional situation rarely provoked

even a murmur. It was, in fact, not life, but the nudity of words that startled her. In this she was the echo of the world whose practice it is to do what it pleases and yet always to talk as if its conduct would have gained a certificate of good conduct from a Nonconformist deacon.

Then there were other beautiful evenings when *The Sign of the Pomme d'Or* being left a-swinging overhead, the three would wander in the garden at the back where in a glorious old apple-tree Aviolet had improvised a swing that proved at first a wonder and a terror to "Baby," till he became persuaded of his mistress's perfect safety therein and would sit lounging, a shadowy, magnificent figure, under the dappling shadows of the leaves. The fact that Miss Alison Craig had called their life "an idyll of youth," notwithstanding Aviolet's white poll, and was generally supposed to be writing a sonnet to Baby had no terrors for them in the triple brass of their threefold union. For Aviolet was one of those rare men who hear every note in that quaint symphony called a woman's heart; he proved himself, too, to be of still rarer quality by finding in it all the music he needed.

Or shall we say that he heard nearly every note? For not even he could guess at the moments when, in the dark stillness of a country night, the sole sound she could hear was his breathing by her side. In the calmness of such content even Elise when she came to stay threw aside her restless craving for she knew not what and played with Ned in the hayfield or made the German cakes for which she was famous, with a joyous abandon that echoed Cecily's comforting contralto tones.

"There must," groaned Miss Craig to Mrs. Strode, "surely be some storms one day over such a cloudless blue. But perhaps in your loneliness, my dear friend, you may be permitted to attract the electric agitation from the beloved heads of your dear young couple."

"Act as a lightning conductor," snapped Mrs. Strode. "Well, I'm willing to—or an umbrella, if it suits the Fates better. Meanwhile, I'm going over to tea with Cecily. For, if my house is left unto me desolate, I suppose there's no reason why I shouldn't take a camp stool and sit in somebody else's house for a time."

A good many people began to form the habit Mrs. Strode had thus metaphorically described. Amongst others came families of children from the foundry who, boarded out by fortnights at a time with Mrs. Pym, usually spent a good many hours of their stay in the Aviolets' garden. As the third batch that summer, came the Holman children whose father was still in the hospital, suffering no longer from the concussion of the brain that had sent him there, but from an incurable internal complaint afterwards discovered.

"So this is the little lot you've brought me this time," said Mrs. Pym, standing one afternoon with her hand shading her eyes from the glaring sun to inspect the children who stared in silent sheepishness over the edge of the wagonette that had brought them, with Philippa Halliday as conductor on this tour into the unknown. For a train-de-luxe to Mars would not give half the pleasure to a man that a third-class pass to Margate gives a child. That is one thing to which none of us can go back.

"A more peaky, wambling, white-faced crew never did I behold," said Mrs. Pym, regarding them with the experienced eye of a poulterer. Already she was busy in fancy with a line of little bodies hung out to air, so to speak, in the sun and wind and scrubbed night times with the good yellow bars of household soap whose scarification the pinkness of her own cheeks had withstood for sixty years.

"Ay," she remarked to Philippa as the party trailed into the house, "many's the time I've heard tell of 'ee, though 'tis the first time I've set eyes on 'ee to swear to. Well, you'm a proper town body to look at, and how townsfolk keep any flesh on 'em, leave alone a skin, in they mucksy, closesmelling places is more than I can say. I never, myself, could so much as put down an egg that was laid up in one of they back yards of yours. And measly pork, too, fed on hospital sponges! And so 'twasn't to be expected that you'd be much to look at," she concluded frankly, "no offence meant, though."

"And none taken, Mrs. Pym," said Philippa, somewhat cast down, however. "I've lived in town nearly all my life, so it's no wonder I've no colour."

"And sitting muzzing over papers all day, too," said Mrs. Pym, bustling about over the preparations for tea. "Just

you come down here and prink yourself out a bit, same as other maidens do, and I'll warn you'll get a man. 'Tis wonderful what a sharp eye and a ribbon or two'll do with they. And if I've said it once, I've said it forty times, my sister Bessie, hard-featured as a pump handle as her be, would never have got Jim if it hadn't a been for the new Garibaldi body her'd got up that Sunday. Come down and bide a bit here. Upham chaps be not so bad, especially when there's nought else to be had."

"No, no, Mrs. Pym," said Philippa with a laugh, "I don't think your prescription is any good."

"Tell 'ee what 'tis," said Mrs. Pym severely, cutting rounds of bread and butter furiously with a loaf pinioned to her waist, "your mouth's out o' taste for what's on the plate afore 'ee. You'm too high learnt for a working chap and not tasty enough for the others. But I've took a fancy to the straight up-and-down looks of 'ee, and I'll do my best for 'ee. A woman's not half a woman without a man, and that's God's own truth. I've no patience with the prinking, finicky toads that turn up their nose at this man, and mince over that man, till they'm as withered as a sheaf of year-old barley. Take a man, my dear, if you get the chance, for 'twill put a dash of colour in they pale cheeks. 'Tisn't blood that runs in a maid's veins after forty, if her *be* maid, 'tis ditch-water. But just you take and be warned in time."

"You see," said Philippa, "I was brought up differently from other girls. My father had great troubles and he was a thought too serious, I suppose. Anyway, he had nobody to talk to much but me, from the time I was table high, for my mother was always ailing, and full of her own aches and pains."

"Ay," nodded Mrs. Pym, ladling out dabs of gooseberry jam for the children, "and when there's one ache, they'll say there's twenty. From head to foot a gnawing sore! I know that sort. A bed-lier that's quiet is nothing to a groaning walker."

Overawed by such a mastery of words, Philippa relapsed into silence.

"And so your father filled up your head with old notions?" queried Mrs. Pym.

"I don't know, but anyway I tried to push myself up and never, since I left school, have I put on a dress I didn't pay for, or eaten a meal I hadn't earned. I can stand upon my own feet and keep my own end up, too. Indeed, I should scorn not to be able to hold my own just as if I were a man."

"Just as if you were a man!" screamed Mrs. Pym, "whatever do 'ee want to be the same as thic poor trade for? Why, if I didn't think a woman better than a man, it's not me that would be able to hold up my head this day. But I reckon you'm a sour crab-apple, my dear, with about as much sense as a sucking-turkey. Just you wait till you'm sitting all alone by yourself of an evening, with not a soul to pass the time of day with. That'll tell 'ee you'm wrong."

"I've sat like that often," said Philippa.

"And you liked it?" asked Mrs. Pym maliciously.

Being a scrupulously truthful woman, Philippa kept silence, for she was, in fact, beginning to suffer all round from the anomaly of her position.

Later on, as her guest walked down the street with Cecily, Mrs. Pym stood in the doorway shaking her head at the always uncomfortable spectacle of a gasping fish out of water.

"There's another with maggots!" she exclaimed. "My patience, what's the world coming to? What, with flying machines tumbling down on the back yard and maidens that won't look at a man, if them that are gone were found worthy to look up, they'd be glad to find theirselves tucked up till the last trump."

By daily contact with Aviolet's wider standards, Cecily had long ago passed the snobbish period of her life; having learnt to appreciate the quality of a human being apart from the mere accidents of position, she valued Philippa highly and to-day, as a special favour she led her visitor up to the work room at the top of the house, whence the two stood for a moment watching the lights dart from cottage windows round the river banks below.

"I begin to see why Mr. Aviolet manages to make his romance as real as other people's realism, when I come to this house," said Philippa gently.

"'Romance,'" quoted Cecily from the nomad book on the proceeds of which they had married, "'romance is the breath of the earth drawn out by the sun of fancy. It is one with the sap of the leaves, the grey dust of the walls, and the spirit of joy that the child draws from his mother's veins.'"

Cecily saw the tears start in Philippa's eyes.

"Tell me," she cried impulsively, "you are not happy, and I have so much, that I want to share it with all the world."

"Till I met you and read Mr. Aviolet's books I never believed in such lives," said Philippa. "I love to think that there are women who have such beautiful times as you do."

"I like you," exclaimed Cecily, "I trust you, and I want your help."

"Tell me," said Philippa, her mind running over the barren tenor of her hours and comparing it with the infinite contentment of Cecily's days. "I should like to do something to help you. It would be wonderful if I could."

"It is a thing that's hard to talk about. But you know Michael is my only brother and he is a great deal to me. Every time I've seen any trouble coming for Michael, I've felt it as if it were my own. And I fear for things."

Philippa was sending out thoughts in all directions.

"Yes," she said at last, "I know what you mean. You are thinking of Dr. Lemprière. I hate him; when he looks at you, he makes you feel naked."

Cecily shivered, for although she had no first hand acquaintance with sensuality, she had learnt a good deal from her husband's books. It was always an amazement to her, indeed, that Aviolet should speak with mirthful indulgence of certain hoary, reptilian specimens to be found in those museums of masculinity, the clubs; "a bad child's guide to knowledge," he had dubbed one of these.

"Dr. Lemprière," continued Philippa more calmly, "divides women into two classes, those who are fair game because they work for their living, and those who like Mrs. Strode have a background. I don't think he will do much harm, he's too much afraid of the background in her case. But the worst of his kind is that they see everything in such an ugly light that presently other people begin to see them in the same way."

"Philippa," cried Cecily in misery, "can nothing be done? What is to save Elise from folly?"

"Only her husband can," answered Philippa sadly.

But, as they both knew, Michael was gone on a far journey, like the deaf gods whose worshippers hacked themselves in vain.

Aviolet, while admitting the possible truth of Philippa's idea of contaminating vision when his wife reported her speech to him, was inclined to think that the temple of life is a sty only to the hog who defiles it and that no hoggish view can affect anyone but the base animal who conceived it. But then Aviolet was always on the side of the angels and even he, having the instinctive faith of the idealist's in a woman's intuition, felt vaguely uneasy at the idea of a man of Lemprière's calibre in close proximity to Elise's vanity.

That night Louis, awaking from his first sleep, found the place by his side unoccupied. Getting up, he went downstairs through the cool summer twilight, garden-scented from the open windows at the back, to look for his wife. Having explored the lower part of the house in vain, he bethought himself of the work-room and there at last he came upon her, seated at his table poring over the manuscript of a short story he had read to her that day. It represented the loving labour of a week as, analytically, and with delicate Henry James-like touches, it dealt with the infinite humiliation of a sensitive woman who has lowered her standard of purity to accept a love that is frankly passion and nothing more.

Coming up behind her, he saw that Cecily was not reading at the moment, but gazing out into the night, as she always did whenever she entered this room. The far horizon has the tenderest lure of all to a happy woman; it is only the embittered who pull down the blind in face of the blue distances.

"What is it?" he said, standing by her side and drawing her close.

"I wish you had not written this," she said. "I wanted, as I sat here, to destroy it."

"Cecily!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, of course, I knew all along that I shouldn't do it," she said wearily, "but I hate it. I look at it and I think

of what may be in store for Michael and Elise. I know it's fine work. Yes, I see that. It is possible for any woman who isn't happy—to do what Norah does in the story. But it hurts that you, a man, should know it, too, should know how bitterly degraded she was."

With the thrill of the psychologist on the trail, Aviolet held her tight, tenderly forgiving her interference for the sake of her delicate feminine perception. He felt that she had just presented him with a gift.

"Cecily," he laughed, "people are always talking about what art is. Do you know?"

But, by the mercy of Heaven, she did not.

"Well," said he, "some call it the essence distilled from the flower of life in the alembic of experience. But, my precious, without that verbiage, 'tis life. This tale is life, as I see it, for it's true, and mayn't one tell the truth, even of a woman?"

"No, not if you're chivalrous, sir. Put it away, or better still, destroy it."

Much wrought upon, for he wanted the money, he said drily: "There's a good £20 that you're asking me to chuck away."

"Give it to me for a present, that story," she said, eyes shining even in the dimness, "and if you do, I'll give you a present—in a few months' time."

The borzoi coming with gentle clicking of his nails across the bare floor shortly after to see what was toward with his two chums, found a professed agnostic on his knees offering homage to womanhood, while a professed church-goer kissed the agnostic's eyes with the benignity of a Madonna by anticipation: all these were ecclesiastical mysteries the borzoi had mastered, for was he not in the habit of waiting for his mistress in the church porch whenever he was not, *par aventure*, laying collies, wolf-like in smell, across the dust of earth?

And *The Woman in Possession* was offered, Dido-like, by her creator on a funeral pyre next day, for so did Louis Aviolet hail with welcoming beacon the topmost tackle of that Ship of Desire called a little child as it came silver-sailed over the edge of the world.

CHAPTER VI

AN ESSAY IN HEROICS

A WOMAN lays her old love-story to rest in lavender where a man uses his as the spice in pot-pourri—to flavour his next emotional bouquet.

Such, at least, was Dr. Lemprière's practice, for he was a romantic survival from the age of sentiment and wont to flavour his after-dinner talk with feminine reminiscence, although still on the near side of forty. Possibly the fact that professionally he felt himself a comparative failure made him additionally anxious to secure a reputation for gallantry. For, although gifted by nature with a peculiarly skilful hand and temperamentally endowed with the cautious audacity that is the main characteristic of a successful surgeon, he had been obliged to content himself with a provincial practice, while feeling all the time that a Harley Street door-plate would have been more in accordance with his merits. He was a man, however, who habitually used up all his energy on the daily round and so had none to spend on scaling the heights of research which, nevertheless, his ambition prompted him to attempt. He lacked the eagle temperament which he half envied, half laughed at in Michael, the quality that makes a man in the most humdrum provincial circle still feel himself a path-finder.

Yet it was the hankering for what was denied him that had at first attracted him to the Strode ménage, for both husband and wife refused to sit down to the banquet of life as though they felt it to be a mean meal. Michael he regarded half contemptuously as a man who flew before he could walk, a Johnny-head-in-air whose fall would be great in exact proportion to his height. Towards Elise he felt attracted rather by her charm than her beauty, for Dr. Lemprière was by no means of the coldly sensual temperament, the one unforgivable type that humanity breeds and, hedonist as he was, could look on a beautiful

woman with a glance only one degree warmer than the one he bestowed on the old book-plates and rare bindings on which he ordinarily exercised his taste.

To measure the infinitesimal steps by which one person becomes essential to the comfort of another is to attempt to grasp the creeping mist as it blots out the landscape in the greyness of its subtle folds. It was in this way that the network of Elise's attraction was cast over Dr. Lemprière, while to her he was not much more than what Aviolet would have called a liberal education. His practical position, as far as she was concerned, was that of fellow-actor and critical audience merged in one, and for his benefit she played a cunning comedy, hinted at a tragedy and often succeeded in striking a note of farce. In plain words, he was her first trainer in that diaphanous world of feigned emotions that formed her true habitat. For the satisfaction of her instincts she required an atmosphere of masculine adulation and since her husband refused the job, she accordingly accepted Dr. Lemprière's services instead.

That was all on her part. For charm he never so subtly, he could never fire her blood and only barely shake her nerves and that, too, merely with the thrill of the artist, never with the pang of the lover. So she noted every weakness of his character with unerring accuracy, even to the strain of meanness that no woman can forgive, for he was the kind of man who travels first-class himself and expects the women connected with him to content themselves with third. Old huntsman of the tender trail as he might be, it was Lemprière who was likely to find the amusement of their mutual posturing the more dangerous.

The turning point came soon after an operation which he performed on the boy. For when it was found that Ned would probably be a weakling unless a risky experiment were promptly tried on him, it was Elise who forced the matter through. She it was who, while Michael hesitated, insisted, prepared the room and the boy, and waited outside till, at the news of safety brought by Lemprière, she stooped, brows damp with agony, and kissed his hand. At the burning touch he started back and, under stress of the moment, exclaimed:

"For God's sake, don't do that."

Yet he was voluptuary enough to find himself rejoicing in the power of passion that welled up in him. He was reinstated in his own conceit and the fact of a woman, as he imagined, being at his feet submerged the satisfaction he felt in the fine thing he had done for her boy. The golden sunlight of the afternoon cast round him the haze of self-deception that makes men mad. Afterwards it would be this haze that he would plead as his excuse—to himself and her, for he was a man who counts detection sheer ruin. It was no world well lost for love that he contemplated.

At last they were alone together in the drawing-room that was her fastness. French windows, heavily curtained from the glare of the foundry, had been cut in the walls that were studded with oval mirrors in whose concave centres flared the foundry fires at night, a half hidden twinkle of ruddy gold. Across the room shivered the scent of jasmine, the sweet forerunner of the autumn peace. It was perfectly still outside but for the faint murmur of the far-off town that sounded like the reminder of those realities which these two were touching at last, till in Elise's hand they shivered to pieces with the tiny tinkle of falling glass.

"I think," she was saying coldly, "that the game we've been playing together is one whose rules you scarcely appear to understand."

"One of the oldest games in the world," laughed he, fatuously complacent.

"On the contrary, Dr. Lemprière. Quite a different one, I assure you."

Blowing smoke-rings, she watched him with an angry gleam of her eyes, while she threaded the skeins of smoke with her long hands to show the perfection of her indifference. Yet the thudding of her heart filled her ears, all the same. Then, suddenly changing her manner, she sat up and defiantly faced him.

"You think," she said, gently tapping the end of her cigarette against the ash tray on the table between them, "you think I've been letting you make love to me?"

"No, I don't think at all. I know it," he laughed.

"Perhaps there was about as much truth in all the other love stories you told me of as there is in this one, then. Just as little, I should say."

"Ah, it was indiscreet of me to talk of those false dawns. But those others only taught me to appreciate you the better."

"A professional woman-taster, in short. But don't apologise. I was infinitely amused by them, I assure you. But did you really," she asked, narrowing her eyes reflectively, "really think I cared for you?"

Then, as he kept silence under her mockery, she said more seriously, "I suppose I was flattered, complimented, anything you like. But for the other thing, no, a thousand times, no."

"Yet there was that morning when I told you the boy was safe?"

"Oh, that!" she exclaimed, "why that was for Ned. You see, I love him and—strange as it may seem—I love Ned's father, too."

She heard, rather than saw him wince. Then, as his eyes gleamed, she knew she had really drawn blood at last. It was what she desired, for she was angry, humiliated at the situation into which she had drifted.

"Ned's father," he said slowly, puffing out a trail of smoke, "Ned's father who scarcely seems to know whether he has a wife or not."

They were both silent, till at last she rose, and trailing across the room in her sweeping black dress, laid her hand on the bell.

"No," he cried curtly, "you can't do that. I apologise for the last, but the sting is that it's true and you know it. Come away from the bell, we've got to have this out. Elise," he stammered angrily, as he drew her into the middle of the room, "you can't say I've been nothing to you all these months. You brightened at my coming, we've been hours together and, by God, there never was a woman I loved better than you."

A faint feeling of pity for him crept over Elise, the pity that is more contempt than anything else.

"So," she said, "you think Michael neglects me? Well, if he does, he has the right to. I haven't lived with him all these years without learning how small I am beside him. I was an ignorant school girl when I married and since then I've changed. I have awakened and Michael has fallen

asleep, that's all, sound asleep. Perhaps he'll awake some time. I don't know."

She spoke drearily, as though too tired to bear up any longer.

"Anyway," she continued, "I'm not in the least the woman you take me for. Admirers I like, but I've no use for a lover at all. That's the plain truth."

"Oh," he cried angrily, "what does he care for you, penning you up here when he's a rich man?"

"No," she said curtly. "No, you're mistaken. He's not at all rich, but I am. Practically the Phoenix Works belong to me."

"To you?" he asked with a stare.

"Yes, to me. When I married him, my dowry was put into the foundry. The greater part of the capital that runs it became mine when Michael bought out the first proprietor."

He paid her the insult of showing a marked increase of respect when he heard of her position.

"Then I suppose," he said, "you agree with his theories. I had no idea of that. It is you who are going to hand over your wealth to the employés of the firm. It is magnificent, of course."

From her startled look, he saw that his random words had thrown a new light on the situation. He suspected, which was indeed the case, that all the talk she had heard of Michael's plans had conveyed no specifically definite idea to her but faintly interested mind. Yet she parried his attack.

"The conversation has taken a strangely business-like turn," she said as, walking across the room, she flung the long window wide open, forgetting that she thus exposed the whole room to the gaze of the passers-by. Now, as she stood looking out into the tangled garden, the acrid scent of privet overpowered the jasmine, and she bitterly bewailed her wounded self-respect and lost dignity.

"So it has," he said as he stood close behind her. "Ah, my darling, you have only been playing with me. You are not so good, after all, as you've been pretending."

The words rang out clearly across the garden to the privet hedge behind which walked Philippa Halliday. She was

on her way to the house to search for a missing letter among the papers in Michael's bureau. Now, with the sound of rushing waters in her ears, she stood still for a moment and then, turning on her heel, sped away up the road by which she had come. Neither of the two in the window had noticed her.

Elise put up her hand with a gesture of anger. "Stop," she cried, "before you say anything worse. I blame myself more than I can say for this impossible situation. You have mistaken me completely."

"And whose fault was that?"

"Ah, but you are ungenerous."

"A woman always says that when one speaks the truth."

"Yes," she answered in a low voice, "perhaps it was my fault. I suppose it was. And I am very sorry. I've often thought it would be better if I went away, better for Michael."

"If you went away?" he echoed in amazement.

"Yes, that I might make myself a place in the world. But there will never be any man for me but Michael. I could not go with any one else."

Suddenly looking up she saw his surprised chagrin at the literal way in which she took the position. Then she understood the full meaning of his surprise."

"Oh," she cried, "I didn't understand. You meant . . . something different."

He was inwardly lashing himself for the stupidity of his silence, but he could only wait, paralysed and tongue-tied by the startled misery of her eyes.

"I didn't know you felt like that," he said, naïvely expressing his estimate of her in brutal words.

Then she heard with relief the slam of the door behind him. The lingering pity she had felt for him was all lost now in the scorching sense of her own humiliation.

When, later on, Cecily arrived to spend the night with her, for Michael was to be away till the following morning, she found her sister-in-law strangely pre-occupied, with eyes that seemed to be looking at something very distant indeed from the walls of the house. When the house was asleep that night, there came a knock on Mrs. Aviolet's door; it was Elise coming in without a light.

"Cecily, let me stay with you a bit," she said, lying down on the outside of the bed. After a pause she whispered very low: "You who find it easy to be good, don't condemn me when I behave strangely. Oh, Cecily, Cecily, my mother bore me so queer a thing."

Lying in the darkness Cecily wondered what could be the cause of this outburst from a woman so self-contained as Elise.

"Michael does love you," she said at length, seeking with her wifely heart for the one source of restfulness she could herself conceive.

"But I want fussing and petting and he's so big and he makes things so empty. And then I play and pretend to myself I'm a woman that men want," cried Elise, childishly truthful.

This was deep water for Cecily, but she plunged gallantly, like plucky terrier after wiry hound. "But you are that, Elise," she cried, "Louis says he never saw a more interesting creature."

"Excepting you, *petite*, always excepting you," said Elise, suddenly recovering and pinching the plump chin she could hardly see.

She awoke in the morning with the cold fear that she had made an enemy. Yet, after all, she argued, there was no weapon for Dr. Lemprière to use against her: that the most satisfactory revenge to him would be to injure her husband she never imagined. And as the hours of the day wore away, the business instinct awoke in her. For it was true enough that Elise would have made a thrifty middle-class wife, had there been any call for her talents and now, as she paid the petty household bills, she reproached herself for not being in a position to handle larger affairs. Finally drawing her bank-book from its drawer, she sat frowning over its record; four per cent, she said to herself, four per cent, that ought to have been twenty or thirty. And today she had hesitated to order herself a new set of furs! With compressed lips she began a long letter to her mother, but when it was finished and addressed to Mrs. Lesueur's headquarters in Bond Street, she sat frowning at it for a long time. It was an act of disloyalty to Michael that, following on the miserable scene of yesterday, annoyed her.

Yet there was no other way; what he contemplated was sheer robbery of herself for the benefit of a class for whom she had not the smallest sympathy. They existed, they were useful, of course, but their activities, however needful to the world's comfort, were better kept packed away in the dark corners to which the common sense of the race has relegated them.

Dr. Lemprière's words had borne fruit and they bore the more for the fact that, by a curious inverted style of argument, Elise felt convinced that it was not she herself, but Michael, who had really humiliated her, by leaving her exposed to the machinations of such persons as Dr. Lemprière. Elise was, in fact, the last person in the world to chant *mea culpa* for more than ten minutes.

It had been a relief to Philippa Halliday that night to find herself back in the office alone, for on the way there she had passed several people and it almost seemed, as their shadows mingled with hers, that the knowledge of her secret thoughts must have leapt from her to them. Here in these high walls, she felt as if in a fortress and slipping the key from the outside to the inside of the lock and turning it softly, she let down the portcullis. In the dazed bewilderment of her nerves she only felt glad to be alone, glad also to know that Michael was away for the night, until the fact's significance for the lovers came with a stab that awoke her to pain.

In that misery she struck the bottom depth in herself and saw that her sensation, after all, was joy, the savage joy that sprang from jealousy of a woman who had everything that she herself lacked—beauty, love, wealth, ease. It was the first primitive jealousy that sets the beasts raging, for to a woman of her class Dr. Lemprière's words could only bear one meaning. They were clear as day and they rang over and over again in her ears while she lay with her arms across the desk, shrunk down and trying to make herself smaller and smaller that the body might suffer less. For joy and pain partook now so much of the same nature that they were but the whirling out and back of the same shuttle, the vibrating shuttle of the heart that, never still by night or day, by the mercy of nature seldom rises beyond the vaguest consciousness of internal movement. At last came

deadness and she lay breathing slowly with the great puffs that mark exhaustion.

Slowly, like milk curdling to whey, came the thought of what this meant for Michael. At the idea she began her journey upwards from the fierce jungle battle of the sexes through infinite gradations of higher passion, up to the highest point she had ever reached—not Michael, but his work.

Philippa was no subtle woman of civilised deception, but a plain dealer and to her thought, if Elise cared for another man, she must either hate or despise her husband. With a pang of the mental jealousy that is the spiritual counterpart of its animal ancestor, she knew that she had always grudged Elise the help her wealth had given Michael. So leaping on the ring of burning iron that hedged her in, she sought in vain a way of escape, till in the effort after self-control, she forced herself to continue typing the letters she had yet in hand.

In the doorway when she was ready to leave, she looked back, so ugly were the phantoms she left behind her. They looked the more hideous for the other associations of the room, till she felt constrained to leave the door open for a few minutes, so that the air might steal in. Against the sky the shell of the new bath houses for the men pointed the irony of half-finished schemes.

In the night her mind turned constantly to Cecily and her husband, though, at the back of her thoughts, she recognised that to appeal to them for advice at this crisis was just as possible as to proclaim the story from the house-tops. Now, in the call of Michael's dishonour, the few careless words she had spoken lightly to Cecily seemed a piece of treachery. Her schooling was to be by silence and waiting, the hardest taskmasters of all.

After the hour's unconsciousness into which she fell at dawn it was borne in upon her as though told her in sleep that, purified of its baser elements of jealousy, there had dawned on her towards Michael that devotion which asks nothing for itself. She surpassed herself the following day by the quickness with which her brain filled in the details of his social schemes. For by the malice of the ironic gods he chose that particular time to plunge into a maelstrom of

fresh plans. Desperately, yet with the rapidity of a runner who has cast off her weights, Philippa followed him, till by evening the words she had overheard had become dream-like, unreal, a frenzy of the delirious mind. She could not now have sworn in a court of law that she had ever heard them.

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN WITH THE SCALES

ONE evening a few days later Elise was standing behind the half-open door of the drawing-room listening to the sound of Michael's latch-key in the front door. She longed to go out and welcome him, yet she was withheld by the desire to see whether he would come to seek her. For to-day, for the first time, he had completely forgotten her birthday.

There was a pause, during which he was evidently taking off his coat, and she made one step towards the door, but checked herself instantly. Then she heard him cross the hall and close the door of the dining-room, from which, as she knew, he would not emerge till somewhere near midnight. As before his entrance, she could hear nothing but the slow ticking of the clock, measuring out the moments of her frustrated youth. A May-fly of the hour, she craved the pleasure of the noon-day sunlight on her wings. For the one effect on Elise of the air of free-thought she had breathed since her marriage had been to teach her to snatch the passing moments, since they are all we have. As she sat on the lowest stair of the deep, well-like place she could hear through the narrow slit of coloured window at the back the skirl of inland flying sea-gulls and the shouts of men at the ferry. Outside there was life in the open, and all the zest of struggle and freedom. It called quite distinctly.

Like an angry child she registered against Michael the flowers, the paste buckles, the old prints that Aviolet bought for Cecily—and Michael did not buy for her. For weeks before this morning she had been wondering what he would give her, perhaps a piece of lace, for he had certainly heard her complain of a corsage that gaped, bare as Sahara, on her bosom. It had been one of the pleasures of her tiny days to conceive of him as cudgelling his brains to find what

would please her best. Then there would surely be theatre-going in the evening. Only that morning she had dressed with trembling fingers, half from joyful anticipation, half with nervous dread that, after all, there might be nothing for her.

And there was nothing. From Cecily a packet, and several letters from friends, but from Michael nothing! She stared at the sunlight flashing on the table and at Michael buried behind the paper, at Ned with freckled nose invisible in his mug. She fingered Cecily's packet again, turning it over in a vain desire to prove that she had been mistaken and that the address was in Michael's handwriting after all. His voice sounded far away, when he told her that he had to go to Bristol and would not be back till the evening. Feeling a jarring note, Ned slipped down and silently hugged her as soon as his father was gone.

"If only," sighed Mrs. Strode in those days, "if only Michael would remember that people are more than the bread and beef they consume and that, though a woman mayn't have an immortal soul, she certainly has a hungry heart."

But he could not, and to ask him to do so was like expecting Elijah to bother about etiquette, for if ever there was a good reason for celibacy it is when a man is too big to see a woman at all. And although it was true that, deep down, Elise still loved her husband, passion had not ripened into the affection that produces mutual understanding and help. They had drifted apart instead, for while Michael had grown too fast in one direction, Elise had not grown at all, but remained emotionally what she had been at the start, an eager child waiting for sweets. Mentally, however, she had found herself, and day after day spent hours in reading modern plays, recreating the key-rôles of the women's parts in her imagination. Probably nothing could have been worse for her than the spectacle of Cecily's happiness, for by that she saw for the first time what a delicate atmosphere of affection a man can throw round a woman.

At last she got up from the stair and, unable to bear the house any longer, went upstairs and threw on a cloak and hat. At Ned's door she paused for a second, but in her

present mood the thought of him was only an added bitterness. For Michael had settled everything about his son without deference to her wishes. She had wanted Shrewsbury or Marlborough for him later on, but Michael had declared his boy must be of the new time; he should never be tainted by the snobbish traditions, the mean intellectual standards of the orthodox schools. No, he should go to a mixed, socialistic place where manual training and open-air life should make him a man after his father's heart. Impervious to such ideas, Elise only saw that her son was to be robbed of his position and traditions, as well as of his patrimony. He was his father's, not hers, and walking heavily downstairs, so that Michael might hear her go out, she opened the front door and slammed it noisily behind her.

Outside, the wind that blew in eddies filled her eyes and ears with dust and hurried her along, a piece of flotsam, in a blustering chill embrace that annoyed her like an insolent touch. An infinite sense of desolation filled her heart, as when, in the echoing vastness of a great station full of the busy coming and going with which one has no concern, the soul perceives the isolation in which it appears to live. She could not go back that night, or cross the threshold of her home once more, just to hear the ticking of the clock and the creaking silence of the old timbers. The very foundry buildings under the flying scud of clouds that let the moonlight through in lightning gleams seemed like monsters that had robbed her of everything,—of money, of happiness, of children, of the career that might have been hers, had she not stepped so clumsily into the trap that nature had baited for her.

Nothing, except his relations with women, shows a man's character more clearly than his dealings with money. Elise, naturally a lavish spender delighting in opulent display, had now to watch Michael reducing life to the threadbare texture of a workhouse blanket. Small wonder then that, when she saw also his lavish expenditure at the Works, she concluded he was showing signs of mania.

Nor was she altogether wrong: it is probable that every man who rises above the current ideals is driven by a force of inward stress that is not precisely sane as the world

counts sanity. Compelled in the first instance to get his leverage by outwitting his business competitors, Michael had driven an iron wedge into his idealism, so that it was now difficult to see the idealism for the wedge. Like a road-crushing engine he could not afford time to wait while the worms got out of his way, for nothing existed for him in these days but the expanse of obstacles that lay before him to be crushed.

That night, contrary to her wont, Mrs. Strode was neither playing bridge with Miss Craig nor supping with the Aviolets, but seated cosily over the fire in the little breakfast room off the hall, was drowsily contemplating an early retirement to bed. She was alone in the house, for the maid only came in by day, when the sharp whirr of the electric bell sounded at the front door.

Outside stood Elise, her face, as Mrs. Strode saw in the bright glare of the overhead lamp, white and pinched under the shadow of her wide, wing-like black hat. It was but the work of a moment to draw the girl in and lead her to the fire; chafing her hands gently, Mrs. Strode knelt on the hearthrug before her unexpected guest with an unspoken question on her lips.

"No, no," cried Elise, "there's nothing wrong with Michael. Only let me stay here to-night. I couldn't bear to be alone any longer."

Mrs. Strode wasted no time in words, for Elise, like some bird that has alighted from far distances on an Atlantic liner, was cold and tired and plainly in need of material comfort first.

"Sweetbreads!" cried she, in the tone of one inspired, and presently from the kitchen into which she had vanished there came the sound of sputtering and the most savoury of smells.

Returning in a short while with a daintily laid tray, she put it down on a low table by her daughter-in-law's side.

"Come," she said, gently drawing out hat-pins. "Come, I know you had no dinner. Then we'll talk, talk half the night if you wish. See," she coaxed, "there isn't much here, but it's good and you must eat it. Look, it's all frizzling still with hot butter."

Elise laughed till the tears came, while Mrs. Strode poured out a big glass of Burgundy.

"Beaune," she said, "and Louis's gift."

It was not until the sweetbreads were eaten and she had seen the wine put a faint glow into Elise's cheeks that Mrs. Strode dared to leave her for a moment. This event was a breaking of the ice, and to a woman who always wanted to be at the very centre of things the prospect of her own intervention in Michael's matrimonial pie was pure joy.

Hurrying back, brisk and glowing, from her errand, she set the Burgundy, tenderly cradled on a cushion, by the side of the fender and prepared to make a night of it, first refilling Elise's glass and fetching one for herself. She believed, old Pagan as she was, that if wine gladdeneth the heart of man, it is fifty times more effective in warming the heart of woman, since she needs it more.

"Michael!" exclaimed Elise, "he'll wonder where I am, when he goes upstairs and finds me gone."

"I've sent Louis on a bicycle to tell him you're with me," said Mrs. Strode, her lips tightening as she recognised the loneliness revealed by the girl's words.

"I couldn't bear the ticking of the clock and the silence any more," said Elise childishly.

"Tell me," said Mrs. Strode. "Forget I'm Michael's mother. For, indeed, I can see him quite apart from myself."

"I know—mother," answered Elise.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Strode gently. Then, half ashamed of her momentary truckling to sentiment, she said briskly:

"Come now, what's it all about? You'll be the better for getting it off your chest, whatever it is. For a suppressed trouble's fifty times worse than suppressed bile, and we all know what *that* is."

"I don't exist in Michael's sight," said Elise sharply. "He isn't cruel to me. I only wish he were, for then I should know that at least he thought about me. As it is, I'm invisible. He is really beginning to look through me at meals, as though I were a ghost."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Mrs. Strode deliberately, as though dropping stones in a well, "he's empire-building is Michael,

quite as though he were a Rhodes or a Clive, but he forgets a tool when he doesn't want it at that particular minute."

"And you forget also," said Elise bitterly, "that he's using my money all the time. That's not invisible, though I am."

Mrs. Strode's lips tightened. She was angry, though she knew she had no right to be and the consciousness of her own injustice made her angrier still. Elise began to walk up and down the room, feverishly tossing back a lock of hair that fell down her forehead.

"But you're right," she cried, "I've served his purpose, now that I've given him a son. He asks nothing more of me. It's my money only that he wants. It's like a devil always whispering to me—that. He's taken me and everything I have and he doesn't even acknowledge it. It's driving me mad, to think of Michael like this. Yet how can I help it?"

Sitting square on her chair, with hands planted firmly in the Buddha attitude, Mrs. Strode listened with frowning eyebrows.

"You think I ought just to let him use me and thank him for it? I suppose a good woman would."

"I daresay she would," said Mrs. Strode cheerfully, "but, thank God, I don't know any."

Elise stared and then laughed, and the laugh breaking the tension, she sat down on her heels beside Mrs. Strode's chair and, rocking herself to and fro, said:

"Then you don't think I'm so dreadful, do you? You'd feel the same, wouldn't you?"

"My dear, at the present minute nothing would please me better than to lay Michael flat across my knees and let him know what the back of a hair-brush feels like when applied vigorously."

"Oh," cooed Elise, "what a dear you are! I do love people that take my side."

"I don't do that altogether," said Mrs. Strode frankly. "You ought never to have married him. You know you yourself brought that about, and not Michael. You were mad to get him, though why, goodness knows, for what a woman should want to marry an iceberg for, I can't conceive."

"For the pleasure of seeing it melt, of course," said Elise promptly.

"And what's more," continued Mrs. Strode, "you actually pushed the money down his throat."

"I didn't believe he'd stick to his mad ideas."

"Then, if you'd come to me, I could have told you that he would. If only every girl would come frankly to a man's mother when she thinks of marrying and say, 'Now, just tell me what's the mixture that your son's made of' we shouldn't have as many complications as we do."

"It's too late, now," said Elise.

"Yes," said Mrs. Strode, "the immediate question is—in this present condition of things, what's the way out? It always *is* the question, and be hanged to it," she added, viciously passing a hand under her glittering crown of white hair and rubbing the scalp vigorously.

"What you have to do," she said at last, "is to get off the fence. If only some philanthropist would take down all the fences in the land, so that neither a Cabinet minister nor an erring husband could find one to sit on, we should be a better and a wiser nation. Get off your fence, my dear, and don't play fast and loose with your life, like a politician who's in favour of a bill that he hasn't spunk enough to support. Come off!"

"What do you mean?"

Full steam a-head, Mrs. Strode developed her idea.

"Marriage and politics are very much alike," she cried, "for they both stretch the elastic of a temperament till it snaps in the weakest point. Now, just hark to me; this money's your fence. If you love Michael better than yourself, love him so that you'll give up everything you have to him—not the last drop of your blood, which nobody wants, but your money which everybody does—then you must let him keep it, without asking for acknowledgment, or thanks, or any return whatsoever. You'll have to withdraw into your shell and eat your heart out with trying not to long for something you'll never get. Do you love him well enough for that?"

"No," said Elise curtly. "I don't. I don't feel that a man who can take a thing in that way is worth loving."

"Just so. Neither should I."

"But you're very wonderful," cried Elise, "you're just —and yet Michael's mother."

"My dear, they didn't make the figure with the scales a woman merely because a skirt drapes better than a pair of trousers. I look forward to the time when half the judges in the land will be women and *their* balances will be, I believe, the more justly held. But to our muttons: Michael can't go on as he's doing at present. The turning-point's coming; he'll be obliged to ask you for your formal consent to the handing over of your money to the men. You will refuse—unless. Wait!" she exclaimed, with a gesture so like Michael's that Elise smiled,—"unless you feel you can give it and all it means to you, not for Michael's sake, but for the finer reason, the cause which he is trying to serve. Have you ever realised what that is?"

Elise shook her head.

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Strode sadly. "You're of the harem still. You've never looked out over the world and felt—what to do them justice men have felt for ages—your responsibility for its starvation and misery, its ruin and despair. Look," she said, taking up a paper, "here's a description of a great industry given over to the men to work co-operatively in the method that Michael believes is to be the system of the future. Michael wants the chance to do what this capitalist has done. Do you care enough to help him, not for his sake, but for the future?"

"I don't see why I should be sacrificed," said Elise half sullenly. She was not the same woman, mean, deceitful, luxurious as she had been when her mother was the predominant influence in her life, but although she had widened sufficiently in the Strode atmosphere, to appreciate personal honesty, she had not yet learnt the social instinct of brotherhood that formed the lever of all Michael's actions.

"Then," said Mrs. Strode, "refuse the money."

"But that would break him, would put us apart. I couldn't be still his wife, if I refused it."

"No, you can't sit on the fence. You can't refuse your help—and stay as his wife."

"Do you know what you're saying?"

"I do. I like straight tracks. Open, honest taking of

one way or the other. I shouldn't scuttle a ship that had to be destroyed, I should blow it sky-high."

"And I sent away Dr. Lemprière," said Elise, pursuing some obscure train of thought such as only a woman could follow. Mrs. Strode, however, being a woman, performed the feat.

"Well," she exclaimed, "I should think you could find for consoler something better than a smirking tom-cat."

"But surely you can't possibly be advising what you seem to be?"

"Yes, I am. Take your money and go, if you don't love Michael or his work well enough to let him use you and yours."

"*Mon Dieu*, but you are wicked," cried Elise, starting up with flushed cheeks.

Mrs. Strode laughed.

"You may call me what you like," she said, "the label trade is always the line of business that people set themselves up in when they've given up thinking. I don't mind what anybody calls me. My dear, when women understand what the average man has always understood, that if you want a thing you must make straight tracks to it, we shall have many things besides the suffrage that we haven't got to-day."

"And," said Elise, furiously refusing this philosophising, "what's at the back of your mind is that Michael, whom you really love better than anybody in the world, will be happier without me."

"His schemes, and possibly his business will be ruined, Elise," said Mrs. Strode gently, "but I'd rather see him frustrated than dishonest. And he's not really that, he's only a man who can't realise that a woman has her own purposes that mean as much to her as his do to him. Woman has always been the tool, the wire-puller for man and he has always rewarded her in the same way. Only in the West he's mean and won't build her separate apartments but expects her to set up her harem in a common lodging-house, so to speak. But we women have to learn—by action. Therefore I say act, and don't stick like a limpet to a rock. Sin's been called a groping after God. Well, I believe that if you strike out honestly, no half measures, for

what you want, you'll not find God perhaps, but you'll do the next best thing—discover you haven't found Him. And you'll never do that by whining and letting things slack out anyhow."

"I shall go up to town and see my mother," said Elise, over whose head Mrs. Strode's outpourings passed like distant thunder. "You say refuse Michael and——"

"I don't," said Mrs. Strode angrily, "I say do what you want to do, not what you think you ought to want to do, or what people in general think you ought to want to do. By all the gods, Elise," she exclaimed, "be yourself for once in your life."

"I will. I shall go up and see mother. She made the money and she ought to have a word in saying what's to become of it."

"You are," cried Mrs. Strode, "the most incorrigible shuffler I ever saw! Now you want to bolster yourself up by what your mother says."

"You only say that because you'd prefer I should bolster myself up by what *you* say," retorted Elise. "If I was born vacillating, I must vacillate. *Ciel!* how can I be a great striding woman like you?"

Mrs. Strode's hearty laugh rang through the house, till the grey cat who had wound himself up on the cushion shared by the Burgundy bottle lifted his head and purred with joy.

"You're right," she cried, pulling Elise towards her. "Poor little woman! No lover and no nothing, only a shrew of a mother-in-law. But, my dear," she added gently, "although she didn't say so, she's very sorry for your heart-ache and more sorry still for her son's blind obstinacy. Have you tried—" she hesitated—"the old way, the siren's way that women have used since Eden?"

Elise flushed and trembled, while the tears gathered thickly in her dark-lashed eyes.

"I can't," she whispered, "I care too much for him to befool him like that."

At that Mrs. Strode took the girl in her arms, feeling, for all her lusty show of confidence, that the problem was of deeper nature than could be solved by any mere theory of fence-sitting.

Later on, as she stooped to tuck the eider-down quilt more closely round Elise, the latter whispered:

"Mother, do you think I don't love Michael?"

And Mrs. Strode answered:

"Once I heard a woman say, 'A woman's virtue is like most things in the world, all very well in its place, but like everything else, it can be too dearly bought.' And that's the way a woman feels when a man she loves wants anything of her, her money, her pleasure, her happiness or herself, they're good things in their way, but too dearly bought, if they're kept at the cost of his need."

Elise felt condemned by that standard, but dreading the interview with her mother, she said impulsively:

"Will you go up to town and see my mother with me?"

Mrs. Strode's ribald mind darted to the line:—"Swindges the scaly horrour of his folded tail." She distinctly saw Mrs. Lesueur's cold eyes and silk-sheathed body under the guise of what Mrs. Pym would have called a horniegollick. But, like good Christian, she rejoiced at the prospect of buckling on her armour in face of Apollyon.

"I'll go," said she.

When, later on in the night, she wandered in to speak to Elise and found her in a deep sleep, Mrs. Strode felt distinctly annoyed with herself for having dissolved that tabloid of trional in her guest's posset-cup. She had a great deal more to say and besides she recalled the fact, now it was too late, that trional was supposed to be dangerous.

Next day Michael was confronted with Dr. Lemprière who appeared in the office with the news that Holman, the man injured in the foundry, was dead. It appeared also that by his death Michael was landed in an interesting legal complication, for Dr. Lemprière was prepared to swear that the cause of death was not the accident, but a cancer, from which the man had been suffering for years before his admission to the hospital.

Michael watched the doctor curiously, for he felt somehow that the latter was anxious to offer his services in a shady transaction. It was therefore with a glow which he felt to be at once virtuous and checkmating that he announced his intention of paying full compensation money to the widow.

"I haven't the slightest intention of disputing the case,"

he said conclusively. "I daresay a rascally lawyer could get me out of the obligation, but I really have no desire to——"

"Rob the fatherless," sneered Lemprière, white in the gills at the possible insinuation of his blood-kinship with rascality. "Oh, of course I know your rôle of Great Heart, but don't you think you're forgetting the other side—your duty to your fellow-employers. There is no legal claim on you for this compensation money and you're setting up a bad precedent."

"Why," asked Michael curtly, "are you so anxious to save me money?"

This was precisely what Dr. Lemprière could not tell, neither to himself, nor to anybody else. He merely felt like an irritated wasp in an empty room where there was nothing to feed his venom and nonplussed, he sat fuming, while Michael rose to show that the interview was at an end.

"Come, come, Lemprière," said he, "don't let's quarrel because I'm a quixotic crank. But I hate the mean grudging doles between employer and employed more than anything on earth. You know I shall never forget what you did for us in saving the boy."

"I should like, if I may," said Lemprière, treading gently as though the ground were holy, "to do you a second service. Your wife's too highly strung just now. She needs a change. You should take her away."

Michael started and sat for a moment trying to grapple with the faint elusiveness of a situation where, of the many clues presented to his mind, he could not tell which to grasp. Elise had left mysteriously and here was Lemprière with something at the back of his mind which Michael could not fathom.

"I'm obliged to you for your advice," he said stiffly, "but I hear from her this morning that she's going up to town with my mother. And, you will excuse my saying so, Lemprière, but I think both my wife and I are quite capable of settling our own affairs."

"In other words, you find me officious," said Dr. Lemprière curtly. "It really seemed to me, however, that a man so immersed in business as yourself would hardly find time to note your wife's symptoms, as a doctor might do.

To a member of such a highly organised profession as the medical the haphazard, rule of thumb methods of businessmen always cause irritation, I suppose. You're all such amateurs in everything you do, too, you social reformers. Your fighting really looks just as civilian warfare does to a professional soldier. Soldiers and doctors are the only professionals to be found nowadays."

"Yet you take it upon yourself to interfere in a matter of law."

"Not at all. Not at all. I merely remark that (*a*) Holman died of a cancer, and (*b*) Mrs. Strode requires change of scene and should not be packed off anyhow, per Carter Paterson, so to say. You should go yourself with her, if you wish any good to result from her travels."

"Thank you," said Michael, "I do not consider my mother quite in the light of a Carter Paterson's van."

With the joy of one who has, in default of a javelin, succeeded in implanting a good long darning needle in his enemy, Lemprière departed, leaving Michael in that state of vague irritation which comes upon a man who is scouting across pitchdark country. What in the world did Elise mean by disappearing last night without a word and why again was she going up to London? There are many disadvantages in being a man without sensitiveness to atmosphere, though at first one is apt to consider it an untold blessing to escape the vague sensations of discomfort that arise from the perception of other people's varying moods. Yet it is this same delicate sense that saves us all from many awkward mistakes.

Perhaps to anyone who can conceive a vision of the entire field of human need, Michael's absorption in his foundry and his social schemes may seem too pitifully small an exploit to excuse that sacrifice of his personal life which he was unconsciously undergoing. Had he been one of the great liberators of humanity, a Voltaire striking the shackles off the mind, or a St. Francis awaking its soul, such Juggernaut indifference to the individual would have been praiseworthy perhaps. As things stood he was, of course, merely a man with a pickaxe trying to bring down a few bricks in the wall of the old social order and intensely irritated all round by the necessity of bowing in the House of Rimmon,

by such acts as sending his son to schools he approved of, while the children of his workpeople had only the "bare need" education of the State. Also, he was beginning to feel the claims of his wife; he guessed now that she had social ambitions, that she wanted above all things to enjoy the sense of power which money gives in quickest measure.

There was the fatal break: they both wanted power, Elise the only kind she could recognise and Michael the only kind he did not despise. So far the heavier will had prevailed, the mere bulk of mentality and sinew, although at last, Elise was beginning to see where she could strike her blow for freedom from the aching monotony of sordid days. For so to her seemed the time that strung Michael and Philippa to high endeavour.

Once, in earlier, harder ages, it was necessary to be a great man, a Pascal, a St. Francis, a Bossuet, or a Voltaire, that one might clearly hear the murmur of human misery. To-day it is our highest triumph and our greatest cause of discomfort that it suffices to be only fairly intelligent and moderately sensitive in order to hear it very clearly indeed. Michael was one of the many who hear and one of the few who act. He was so strung up to devote every power he possessed to the task, that the expenditure of a sovereign or the waste of an hour that did not help on his work became to him a grave discomfort. In small matters he was, therefore, miserly and puritanical; in big ones lavish, and wide-minded.

All the time he remained pre-eminently a cool man, with his biggest scheme a little self-centred community living an ideal economic life in the midst of a chaos of injustice. Nor was his conception of human pain the mere dramatic horror of death and loss, the fardels that are inseparable from the state of a sensitive mind in a corruptible body. It was rather the eternal marvel of contrast between the greatness of man's possibilities and the smallness of his fulfilment that oppressed him. As he looked at that inferno of industrial ugliness, the modern city, he saw the gross-breeding quintessence of dust who might be—would be—if only material conditions were better, a creature infinite in faculty, if not precisely noble in reason. Change the sordid streets of the worker to noble, well-proportioned homes, remove the

present necessity for absorption in the mean anxieties of life and you would have a great people. All that was wanted was an economic uplift and a breaking of the line of demarcation between the haves and the have-nots; the world stands no more in need of revelations, either supernatural or rational.

"Hearing full in his ear the sound of the cry of humanity craving sleepless succour for her children," he became deaf to nearer sounds, like a man who in the roar of the breakers cannot hear the hiss of the wave that breaks at his feet.

Meanwhile Elise and Mrs. Strode were going up to town by the afternoon train.

CHAPTER VIII

A REED SHAKEN BY THE WIND

ROUND the corner into Piccadilly Circus, with the dark blue line of police fringing the winding column of clear colour, purple, and white, and green, swept a battalion of suffragettes, proclaiming by the dancing measure of the pipe and tabor their challenge flung down to a man-made world. As they wound their way through the traffic and up into club-land, the notes sounded thin and clear like a far-away bugle call above the hoarse roar of the streets.

From the unclouded blue above, the sunshine fell with pleasant warmth, making one if well clad forget the knife-edge of wind that waited at every corner. Seeing only the maelstrom of crowded traffic, with motors gliding softly from shop to shop, with the roaring crash of loaded vans and the merry jingle of the hansom-bells, to many ears far comelier music than all the sheep bells of Arcady, one would have judged the people that had reached thus far to be the most successful in their own line that had ever lived. From all the corners of the fur-bearing lands came largess of the animals to fill these brilliant windows, and no cobweb curtains of the fairies could be lovelier than the weavings our looms produce. Beside the furs, the silks, the frocks, the metal-work, the china, and enamel of this bright-lit centre of production what can the violet hills of Athens give us, or Rome's broken pillars—save an idea?

Later on, as the sunlight yellowed to ochre and the sky-signs flamed, advertising soaps and patent foods, sailing far above the house-roofs came a row of gigantic birds, war balloons, precursors of the flying men. Air and land seemed conquered till in the strange magnetic storm that was holding up all communication by underground-wire, people began to talk of signals from the Martians, being apparently incapable of believing that the patient earth could show

her tantrums in the face of that all-conquering creature, man.

At last there arrived, police-marshalled once more, a new procession, this time of stunted figures, shiftless, stooping from the shoulders, furtive-eyed or fierce, usually with neckerchiefs knotted round long necks or bull that almost all rose from sloping shoulders and ended in small heads, on which the broken bowler or the muddy cap sloped to the very nape. By the side of the muscular fitness of their guardians the row of dingy derelicts looked as if they belonged to another race. To fine ladies in motors who searched hurriedly for purses, to city men who turned for a moment with a shrug, they appeared indecent; a man does not show his sores, he bandages them. The police were accordingly much blamed for their appearance and the Government for their existence, just as the Prime Minister was blamed for the other appearance of those who are outside—the importunate maidens of the fife and tabor.

But of those who created these splendours, the working furriers, jewellers, dress-makers, weavers, and metal-workers, none were seen either in procession or in show-room, being too busy in factory and slum to appear.

Elise drew a deep breath of satisfaction as she walked up Bond Street by Mrs. Strode's side. They had just turned away from a glittering jeweller's window in which was displayed a splendid black pearl. It was not at all beautiful in itself to any rightly trained eye, but it was worth a fabulous sum; also its history, which was written on it for the adept to read, was a curious one.

"All that," said Mrs. Strode, jerking her head back at the shop, "is like mother's milk to you, isn't it?"

The girl was walking, head in air, like a woman who realises the good turn she does her contemporaries by merely existing. It is a sensation especially enjoyed by women and is probably more than an equivalent for all the sex disabilities of which we hear so much.

"It is my *milieu;* I only exist, I don't live in the backways! Why did I ever allow myself to be buried alive?"

This question brought them to the establishment of Madame Lesueur. Elise judged the solitary dress that stood in the window, an exquisite piece of mediaevalism with its

brocade and embroidered stomacher, with the eye of a connoisseur and Mrs. Strode held her head very high as the two went upstairs side by side. The house, with its green carpets of thick pile and its silk clad acolytes, was a temple. The shrillest voices had here a way of becoming modulated in face of the mysteries over which Madame and her attendants presided with such perfect assumption of that air of holding the key of the varsal world which seems to be the prerogative of modistes and churchmen.

After being ushered into Madame's sanctum, a tiny oval room in *vieux-rose*, they were kept waiting so long that it seemed their arrival had been forgotten.

"Well," said Mrs. Strode, getting up impatiently and beginning to stamp about with feet that seemed unusually prominent, "she's long enough, as Mrs. Pym would say, to dress triplets for a christening, let alone twins."

Mrs. Strode's rabelaisianism was becoming rampant; the mention of triplets in a house whose habitués doubtless regarded the appearance of one infant as an indiscretion was as delightful to her as the request of a Wesleyan minister who, praying in a girl's school kept by spinsters, besought the Deity to bless that house with many births.

When Madame Lesueur at length swept into the room her manner was superb; very languid, very dignified, one felt that the blood of the doges was crawling in her veins as slowly as creeps the water in their lagoons. It was thus made evident that she regarded Mrs. Strode in the light of a beggar on horseback whose rags fluttered so obtrusively that one forgot there was any horse visible at all.

It was a sentiment, she explained, a foolish, yet deep-rooted affection for tradition that had driven her to acquiesce in her daughter's marriage with Mrs. Strode's son. A Bouchier and a Strode, she declared, blotting out the Lesueur blood along with the *W* in Bowcher at one stroke, it seemed ideal. Two ancient families, one could feel no *mésalliance* in that, whatever might be the poverty on one side.

"Or the humble station on the other," said Mrs. Strode, to whom there was nothing on earth more infuriating than languid superiority.

"But," continued Madame unheeding, "it was a

mistake. No one could possibly feel that more acutely than I do. My daughter has not been accustomed to mix with the quite worthy people who do the work for which Nature no doubt intended them, but whose ways are not ours. It is no wonder that the results of her husband's experiments have had a most disastrous effect on my Elise's happiness. There is a certain delicacy of nature in her which I should have thought an observant man would have surely appreciated."

"Mother," broke in Elise, "all this is beside the point. You know I'm in great trouble about what I am to do if my husband asks me to give over my money to be used in a co-partnership scheme. I wrote all this to you and I've come now—we've come—to know what you say."

"Do you believe in co-partnership?" asked Madame, becoming in a moment her sharp, business-like self.

"I don't know anything about it," said Elise. "I'm not a reformer. It doesn't concern me."

"Then are you such a devoted wife that you acquiesce in his robbing you of the principal of your money, as he is already doing in fact, by the rate of interest he's paying you?"

"The current rate," interposed Mrs. Strode, putting the bit on herself.

"I'm not satisfied with the current rate in my business," answered Madame.

"No, I should suppose not. Nor is anybody in this Great Babylon, or we shouldn't have to watch the procession we saw just now."

"It is easy to see where my son-in-law," cried Madame, flinging the word in Mrs. Strode's face, "got his madness from."

"I'm going," said Elise, standing up. "We may sit here till Doomsday without advancing a step if you both go on like this."

"I thought," said Madame Lesueur loftily, "that we had already decided the matter. You don't care for 'the poor,' and you aren't a Griselda. Very well, then you have nothing to do but to refuse. Husband or no husband, he's your partner and—you've got the whip-hand. Don't forget, my dear, that more women have

been ruined by being too tender-hearted to use the whip that circumstance put in their hand than can ever be counted."

"That means, remember," said Mrs. Strode, "that you practically divorce yourself. Michael's not the man to sit down tamely and be complacently refused what it's in your power to give."

"Why," cried Elise, "it was only last night that you wanted me to do exactly what *my* mother says now."

Mrs. Strode was dumbfounded, being indeed hoist with her own petard.

"And," continued Elise brokenly, "there isn't much of husband, or child, or home for me to lose. There hasn't been for a long time."

Getting up quickly, she hurried to the window to hide her face, while the two combatants watched her.

"Elise," said Madame Lesueur softly, after a pause, "don't forget what I said to you long ago. There isn't a man in the world who is really essential to a woman's happiness—if she doesn't allow herself to think so."

"Not even one's husband?" asked Mrs. Strode.

"One's husband least of all."

"You know what you're doing?" asked Mrs. Strode rising.

"I do," answered Madame Lesueur, leaning forward suddenly like an image worked by some hidden spring. "I'm foiling your son in his thieving. Philanthropy!" she shrilled, "I understood honesty, and I understand theft, but I've no use for philanthropy. Did you really think I was going to stand by and see my daughter kept a poor woman by her own husband? A yacht, a motor, a town house! That's what her *dot* ought to have brought her and it shall."

There was a silence while the three stared at one another, as people do at the naked exhibition of some root passion. It was Madame Lesueur who recovered herself first.

"Elise will stay with me to-night," she said, "and join you, if she wishes, at your hotel in the morning."

And Mrs. Strode went away without a word and betook herself to Berners Street.

That night, dressed in a gown that waved in billowy

masses suggestive of pearly mists, Elise sat by her mother in a box at the theatre. They had driven there in Madame's motor-brougham after a restaurant dinner whose ménu had been very carefully chosen with the purpose of expressing the maximum of elegant epicureanism. For Madame had an obvious purpose in all this magnificence.

The play was a curious dithyramb which, satire on all religions as it was in its frank confession that religion is no link with the divine but a mere anæsthetic for the suffering, had nevertheless gained the approval of 'the professing classes,' though whether in an access of frankness or stupidity it is hard to say. They had come now to the last act when in the awesome shadow of the temple the wretched of earth are kneeling to beg a miracle from the god. The priest who believed in no intervention of the divine had moved the eyes of the image through pity and in scorn of his own honesty.

At this point Madame Lesueur leant forward and tapped her daughter on the arm.

"Would you have done that?" asked she, as the priest on the stage cowered before the effect of his own act.

"No," said Elise curtly. The howling of the mob of suffering wretches made her angry, rather than pitiful.

"Then don't do it in your own case," whispered Madame in return. And in the roaring from the stage mob she developed her ideas.

"Christianity is as dead as the creed of Isis or Horus. And they know it, these people who——"

She pointed round the theatre, at the smooth silky heads of the women, and the bald heads of the men, dimly seen along the stalls and dress circle.

"Who will want to keep the people quiet, just as they did in Egypt. So they give them a new religion."

Elise stared; these were her husband's words, only in a new application.

"What religion?" she whispered.

"What they call philanthropy if they're mealy mouthed and Socialism if they're daring. They all tell them that the brotherhood that begins with plucking the rich will end in putting an end to want. If God doesn't care, man does. All will be well—if they only vote for the right side. And

all the time we have hunger-marches and riots on Tower Hill."

At home, in Madame's flat that night, Elise suddenly looked up from her quail and champagne and said:

"Mother, what did you mean by all that about the new religion? How do you apply it to me?"

"My dear, your brains are not improved by provincial life! Don't you see that your husband is one of the many priests of the new religion? Doesn't he tell his men that co-operation, and that's no better than a branch of Socialism, is going to end poverty?"

"I don't know. But I do know that his hardest fight has been with a troublesome Socialist fellow who, everybody says, ought to have been dismissed long ago. So I don't see what your ideas have to do with Michael."

"Only this. That he's deceiving his men, by telling them of an end of their troubles, when there isn't one, just as that young priest, by making the image wink, made the people think the gods were going to do something for them."

"Oh, do let me alone. Everybody fogs me so. I want to be happy, that's all, and I don't want to be bothered about things that don't concern me."

And breaking down, she sobbed bitterly, while the quail grew cold and the champagne fizzed into flatness.

Next day the two who had bounded, like stones from a catapult, right across England on a momentary impulse, returned to Exminster, both drowsy with the reaction that follows an emotional outburst. At the station they parted, Mrs. Strode to go down to Upham and Elise to return home.

At the door of the newly opened enamelling works where she had been told Michael was to be found Elise stood still. In front of her stretched between the gaunt walls what looked like a row of stone bastions running side by side down the long, clean-swept, whitened building. Semicircular iron doors that slid up and down formed the only openings to these outworks, that held within their unseen depths a veritable hell of fire fed from underground furnaces whose red-hot gratings she had seen as she entered the place over a sort of raised causeway. In front of each trap-door waited two half-naked figures holding huge tongs similar to those handled by the demons in the mediæval miracle-

plays. Suddenly the iron traps were pushed up and through the doors she looked within, into the heart of a sea of fire, iridescent, shot with strange lights, purple, green, rose-red, and violet, of shades seen in nothing else on earth but the raging energy of fire. Pulsing and paling like the living flame of creative life, the energy within seemed to breathe, as the waves of air from without passed across the cavity. The terrific wave of heat that sprang across the room seemed almost to frizzle the hairy skin of the workers who, with the fierce gestures of haste, powdered the long oval of the iron bath they were handling with the enamel and pushed it into the midst of the flame. With a crash the trap-door fell and the fire was left to do its work unseen, while the men shrank back, sweating and panting, to wait till the moment when the doors must be opened again. At the far end of the room the broken walls of one furnace, its fire-bricks crumbling and charred like disintegrating bones on desert sands, stood gaunt and leprous in ruined whiteness, for there had been an explosion there a few weeks back.

In a moment Elise's eyes filled with tears, for as she looked into that horrible beauty of fire, she suddenly understood; it was not brick, nor coals, nor that strange element half-demon, half-god, the fire, that was destroyed here; it was human energy. She remembered now, as she watched the savage gestures of these enamellers, that each man only worked for two consecutive days at a time, so heavy was their toil.

Suddenly this scene linked up with the pride of life she had seen in the glittering centre of wealth in London. She understood Michael, and when she saw him coming down the room towards her, it was with outstretched hands that she met him.

"My dear," said he, drawing her away across the yard and into the office, "what a start you gave me by running away that night. Have I been careless of you, my little one?"

As she sat on the arm of his chair, he gently laid his hand on the fur of her long coat. The gladness in his eyes sent a shock of dismay through her heart, as she remembered the way she had been, for the last two days, discussing him with—. She stopped suddenly, for after all they were not

strangers, although she now felt that she had undoubtedly been disloyal to him. For a moment, as she laid her cheek against his, they were one against the world, she and Michael, in a way that would have seemed impossible just twenty-four hours before.

Then she found some work to do for him and was unspeakably happy in the planning of it. It appeared that there was dining at the house the engineer who had been working out for Michael an estimate of the cost of bringing the canal up to modern requirements, supposing that the Town Council could be got to sell at a reasonable price. It was sheer delight to Elise to make her rooms look cosy and her dinner worth the eating, and as she sat listening to the man's talk of the odds of nature and human nature he had fought with in so many parts of the world, Elise thought of her bygone escapade as part only of a bad dream.

Yet, later on, hour by hour crept by of the night, while Michael sat over the papers left by the engineer and Elise overhead lay listening to the clock she hated so and to the echo of the baffled wind that shook the window-panes. Sleep would not come to her for anger till, with heart-beats shaking her body, she went out on the landing to look; from the dining-room there was still a streak of light across the hall.

Long afterwards she heard Michael come upstairs and go into his dressing-room next door. Presently the small camp-bed he kept there creaked under his weight and slipping across the room, Elise turned the key in the door between them. His canal, his foundry, these were all he wanted.

Yet again and again came the scene she had watched in the enamelling shed. And to remember the sensations it had roused in her made her angrier still, but whether with herself or Michael she could not tell.

CHAPTER IX

THE CRISIS

"GIVE me vampires," said Miss Alison Craig, firmly refusing all substitutes, "for cold thrills down the spine there's nothing to equal a vampire."

"I fear," said Louis Aviolet, tenderly helping her to cream, "that vampires have been sadly neglected by thrill-mongers. But I don't deal in cold shivers myself, for you see I'm such a martyr to sciatica."

"Ah but your work is of another *genre*, so humorous, so rippling with *espièglerie*. I always tell my friends that you bring to our dull island moodiness the scintillating sparkle of your own gay fatherland."

Louis grimaced, for his father had been a liverish subject addicted to *enterrements* as a subject of conversation.

"The Englishman's melancholy is climatic, like his umbrella," he murmured, unable to keep the conversation up to the high verbal standard demanded by Miss Craig's muse.

Cecily's white and green drawing-room was full of the clatter of tongues and the scent of afternoon tea. In the window sat Elise, watching the plumes of the callers nodding like a field of corn while the hostess, a demurely gracious Ceres, moved about in the midst.

"Now love-songs," said Miss Craig insinuatingly, in the manner of a commercial traveller introducing a new line, "I should have thought the writing of love-songs very stimulating to your ego."

"Love-songs went out with the plumed hats and love-locks of the Cavaliers, for they were the last men who knew the difference between a sentiment and an ideal," said he.

"'Sentiment,'" said Elise, maliciously quoting from the last book, "'the watery negus into which the Englishman dilutes the pure spirit of pathos.'"

"Beautiful," said Miss Craig, swallowing the bait, "what

I always admire in you is that there is never that heaviness, that *lourde* touch of your native writers. Even in our comedies of wit the people never move from their chairs, but sit about for ever prating."

"Ah, such talents," purred Miss Tracy, who sat on the other side, "how I wish they could be used in the missionary cause. Yet I will say, though there is no direct inculcation of religious truths, you never write indelicately and I read *The Jester* twice to find out. It is so seldom nowadays that one can pick up a new book without having to go upstairs a few minutes after to wash one's hands. Quite terrible people in them! I always say that the modern novelist seems to have lived exclusively in reformatories and penitentiaries, particularly penitentiaries. What puzzles me is that quite dreadful people whom one would never even bow to are allowed in the books on our tables," she continued plaintively, taking a sniff at her smelling-salts. "It's so different with the pulpit. Now from there you never hear a word that would make you imagine that such terrible things even existed."

"Perhaps that's why they do," said Elise, slipping her rings forward on her thin fingers.

Miss Jean stared coldly; she strongly disapproved of the curious grey-green velvet gown that Elise wore, also of her attitude of body, as well as of mind. For one of the things most indicative of the refined female, as Miss Jean knew well, is the limited number of poses she permits to a well-corseted body. Now Elise had as many poses as she had moods.

"What I wish," said Mrs. Strode, "is that the novel-writing people would open their windows. Nowadays the pastille-burning young exotics all pull down the blinds and hermetically seal every chink and then invite us to breathe the air they enjoy."

"Don't you think," said Louis, "that we of the pen have just forgotten the difference between the clean dirt and dirty of the housewife? There's no difference greater than that between the big man and the small one as to the way they each regard the dust-bin. The big one finds jewels there, while the small one simply gets in a mess."

"Well," said Miss Tracy, "I like a book that makes me feel comfortable."

"And so do I," agreed Cecily, "I don't want to sit down and be told how miserable everybody is. If it's true, talking won't make it any better, and if it isn't, they're just liars, the people who talk like that. I like a book that makes chocolates taste nicer."

"But, Cis," said Elise, "you always love a comfortable cry, too."

"Oh, yes, a comfortable cry, but not with that raspy feeling you get when it isn't death or illness, but some nasty meanness that makes you want to scratch somebody for it. I'm always glad when a man who writes like that can't get over the five thousand."

"And," said Miss Tracy, testifying, "you'd never think anything was ever done for the poor, if you listened to them. If people will drink and be thriftless how is that the fault of the rich? And as for Christian professors, they're all either made out to be hypocrites or brutes. Yet where should we be without Christianity?"

As no one seemed to feel competent to deal with a question that puzzled a Lecky and a Mommsen, Aviolet filled the breach.

"You remember," said he, "what Balzac said about Christianity?"

Miss Craig held her breath for the expected audacity, for she associated the name of the great Frenchman with midnight masses with the devil. Cecily tried to catch her husband's eye, while Mrs. Strode chuckled audibly into her bonnet-strings.

"He calls it the principal agent of social order somewhere, and I expect that's so, but now that it's being called upon to play the part of physician instead of policeman, it's a bit nonplussed, I fancy."

"But think of the wonderful drying up of cancers and things by the faith healers," screamed Miss Craig, jay-like.

"'Twasn't precisely that sort of healing I meant," said Louis drily.

After the departure of the last guest, Louis drew a deep breath.

"Let's open every window in the place," said he. "Ouf!

Salons, literary or otherwise, don't suit my complaint. Come, Elise, one turn up and down to set the blood circulating."

And while Cecily played a waltz, Aviolet laughingly whirled his guest up and down, till the old floor shook with their footsteps. Then he carried his wife off upstairs to listen to a literary grumble.

The circular bow-window was flashing with sunset when Cecily returned. Inland over the valley stretched a wide bay of aerial cloud-light, rose-pink touched with gold. Deep in the sea of air, islands flaming to purple lay shadowed in clouded pearl, radiant with all the tints of light. One vertical ray, gold-smeared from a celestial volcano, pointed a finger to the zenith.

Elise sat leaning on the sill, her eyes set like a sleep-walker's, while Cecily sank down on the cushions behind her and waited, till the pink turned purple, and the purple flickered into grey touched at its heart with rose.

"So," said Elise, drawing a long breath as the night swept its invisible wings across the brightness, "so it all goes, all we love."

"Only to come again," said Cecily, putting an arm across Elise's shoulder.

"Not for us, for others. What is lost never comes back. The good moment never comes a second time."

"No, but a better one does. Do you think I could bear my happiness, if I didn't know it would only go—to pass into something better? Oh, Elise, I could take the whole world up in my arms and love it, I'm so happy."

"If I were you I should be afraid. I should offer a sacrifice to the jealous gods, throw away a ring, or cut my finger off."

"Or rather," laughed Cecily, "write a bad review of *The Jester*. Do you know," she said, putting up her feet and cuddling them like a happy baby, "that Louis is *The Jester* himself, only not quite as nice as he is in real life? For real things are always a bit jollier than any pictures of them. I've never seen anything in the world so lovely as Louis in his pyjamas. No, not even the Sistine Madonna, or Whistler's mother," she chuckled.

Elise laughed and stretched her long arms.

"Oh," cried Cecily, "how beautiful you are, but how thin. I'm so glad you're staying with us, you and Ned. We must try to fatten you up between us," she purred in her pleasant contralto.

"Cis," said Elise, beginning to pace up and down, "I suppose you're one of the women who think it's always wrong to leave a husband, to acknowledge that you've made a mistake and go back?"

"You can't go back," said Cecily soberly. "Your husband's a bit of you till one of you dies."

"Like your skin," said Elise flippantly, "something you can't slip out of. I don't believe it. Why on earth should marriage be the one human relationship that's unalterable, now that we take children from cruel parents and drop our friends if they get on our nerves?"

"Because it means birth, often, and nothing can make his child not yours. If there's no child, perhaps it may be different. But really, do you know, the subject doesn't interest me at all."

"No, from the serene heights of your happiness, I suppose it wouldn't, but it does me, because you see, I'm not happy."

Cecily was silent. She had hoped, now that Dr. Lemprière had disappeared, that matters were settling down in her brother's household. Mrs. Strode had breathed not a word of the purpose of that journey to London.

"I want my freedom," said Elise, going to the window and standing there with upheld arms, as though to invoke the spirit of liberty. It was as instinctive with her to express thought by movement as it is with the typical Englishwoman to sit absolutely motionless under stress of feeling.

"From Michael?" said Cecily coldly.

"From my present existence—life you cannot call it. I was glad to marry and be made a lady, for you know the sort of upbringing I had, a home without love or tenderness. I often think that my childhood must be one of the reasons why I cannot bring into my home what you bring so abundantly into yours, Cecily. But now the only reasonable thing for us both is to part. It will be as much for his good as mine. The only good he's ever got from me is my money."

"And Ned?"

Elise was silent; her real thought she withheld for fear of shocking Cicely.

"If," said Cecily, her eyes full of tears for her brother's trouble, "if there were anything on earth that I could give Louis, I'd give it, if it was waiting, or money, or service, or, hardest of all, absence. For if he wanted to go from me to another woman I'd—I'd pack his portmanteau for him. I should do it so carefully, for you see it would be the last thing in the world I could do for him. If you only felt like that, you wouldn't mind the dulness of your life."

"But I don't feel like that," said Elise abruptly. "And yet I'm almost sure that the best thing I could give him would be my absence. Yes, yes," she said, like some one feeling blindly over the surface of a wall for the spring of a secret door. "For if I've only half a life, his life must be the poorer for my starvation. If I've got hunger typhus, he may catch it, too. You see," she said slowly, "it would be different if I knew it was inevitable that I should go without what I want, if I were poor, for instance. But—I'm rich, and still I starve. I'm Tantalus come to life again."

Then, sitting down at the piano she flashed her hand over the keys, in a foaming flood of notes that bore her away on its waves like the swirling down-rush of mountain snows that are touched by the west wind. While she played the borzoi lay on the rug and watched her with red-brown eyes that saw the snow-wastes, and with prick-ears that heard the long-drawn wolf-howl of the wild hunting when the moon is up. It was not of the North that the player dreamt, though it was Hungarian music that sent Cecily tiptoeing out of the room, but of the sun-baked South and of the mad swirl of sirocco. At last she wandered into the gnome music of Peer Gynt, that greatest expression of the lawlessness that lives always somewhere in a woman's heart, for Pope's saying, "At heart a rake," means something deeper than the mere fluttering of fans round a card table.

With head bent she wrung the notes out of the instrument, so that, in the abandon of her mood, she did not hear the door open, though the dog moved with a low growl. At last she looked up and saw her husband sitting by the fire. In the illusion lent by the flickering light he appeared almost

as he would when old, with head bent, the hair grey, and the furrows of fatigue worn deep. He sat drawing with his finger an imaginary plan on the polished surface of the small table by his side. It was a common trick of his and his wife smiled as her fingers drifted into that grotesquely tender picture of the eternal sadness of age and death, the passing of Peer's mother. It was of Michael's ways that she thought, of his slow measured voice, his habit of having to be spoken to several times before he answered. She remembered the little meals he alone could make her eat when she had been very ill, the comfort it had been to feel herself lifted in his great arms. The footlight glitter she desired, the wealth and ease, began to seem garish in this momentary fit of tenderness.

She stopped suddenly and coming forward, stood by him, till he looked up and, taking her hands, held her so. On the table was a pile of folio sheets and looking in each other's eyes, they waited for the fight. For, as Elise guessed, on those folios were drawn up the terms of co-partnership. She stiffened in his grasp, as she recalled how the whole family had combined to cosset her, only to leave her alone with Michael at a moment when they supposed her softened by their complaisance to the goose who laid the golden eggs.

She drew her hands away and sat down by the fire on a sofa where her face was in shadow. She saw he was feeling overwhelmed by the trouble of the task before him. "There was going to be such a fuss," as he would have put it.

"I want you to look at this paper," he said, handing it to her.

She laid it on her lap, not deigning even to glance at it.

"You know," he said nervously, "what my plans have been for years, how I've wanted to establish the foundry on a new system altogether."

"Yes?" she queried, coldly acquiescent as though he talked of the nebular hypothesis.

"The foundry is built up on your money and before I do anything further, you must agree to what I propose. I'm only your steward."

She saw how he was suffering a dim irritation and exclaimed:

"Don't talk like that, Michael. Of course, you've done well with it as an investment. But I can't help feeling how much better it would have been if it had never come between us. Oh, yes, it does. It always has. It has simply spoilt our life together, so that it's time to end it all."

"To end it?"

"Yes, I can't be buried alive any more for the sake of a parcel of workmen. I'm a free woman and a person. As it is, I have neither the control of my money, my child, nor myself. I don't want to say hard things, but you must be made to understand. I can go and you can pay me the income I'm now receiving, for a time at any rate."

"That's out of the question. I propose after a few years to give over the Works to the men, retaining only a small salary as managing director."

"My Works, that is."

White to the lips, he said: "We agreed to regard them as mine when we married."

"When we married, I was a foolish girl, knowing nothing of business. I imagined, too, that you would give up your wild ideas and settle down as other people do."

"And do you think I'd let you go and still keep your money? What do you take me for?"

"For nothing worse than a fanatic, Michael."

"You make me out a thief," he cried hotly. Then more calmly, "but do you realise what you are saying? Can you go? Is the past all nothing to you?"

With face convulsed, she was silent for a moment. Then she saw in a vivid flash the old staircase, the closed door, heard the heavy silence of nothingness measured by the slow tick-tacking of the great clock.

"I must," she said in a low voice. "But the money I will not withdraw. Carry out your plans. You shall have a deed of gift."

"That's impossible, absolutely. I must—begin again. If you go, you take with you every penny that is yours, even if the Works close."

After a pause during which they heard each other breathe, he cried:

"My God, tell me I'm mad." Then, placing her two hands on his shoulders, he forced her to look up. Strained

face gazed at strained face, till the skin seemed to tighten over Elise's cheek-bones and her features to dwindle to the size of a child's.

"Elise, you didn't mean what you said?"

He was smoothing her hands over and over in his.

"My darling, can't we find another way?"

Heart-struck with his misery, she weakened, till there flashed to the bottom of her heart, a pencil of sunlight in the depths of a well, the hope that, after all, she had won her point.

"Only give up this folly," she cried, "this talk of giving over the foundry to the men and let us use the money that is really ours. Oh, Michael, we might be so happy if you would. Think of how much better it would be for Ned, too. Oh, Michael, say yes. Destroy that paper and be like other people."

Michael's eyes grew hard and he could see nothing, only hear her breathing and inhale the sweetness of her charm. Standing thus, he too saw pictures—of the scenes that led to Pym's forge and the foundry, of the millions toiling for the barest pittance, of other employers less hard pressed than he who were already doing what he had planned, of the age-long patience of the world where Labour waits.

Putting his lips to hers, he held her crushed against him, till she cried out at his strength, while the dawning glory of their first love was born again in the throbbing delirium he drank of her.

Yet, even in that moment he chose. Setting her down at last and holding her quietly for a second as she swayed, he said:

"I cannot do it."

* * *

In the evening she returned home, refusing to stay with the Aviolets any longer. Michael remained away all night and going into the child's room, she lay down beside him, noticing as she did so, his father's trick of sleeping with cheek on arm. Tingling in every vein she crept closer and opening the breast of her gown, lifted him so that he might lie as he had lain as a baby. Small, selfish, bitter, her soul

was poised quivering in the torture, yet love of her child could not soothe the anger at her heart that Michael would sacrifice nothing to her.

It was the worst moment of all, this, with the child's soft breathing in her ear.

CHAPTER X

BEAUTY'S SINGLE HAIR

THERE is nothing more soothing to a perplexed and somewhat elderly woman than to feel she has the wisdom of a business man at the back of her, especially when she knows that, with a little persuasion, she can possibly avail herself of the leverage of his wealth and general worldly resources. It was with some such idea as this that Mrs. Strode sent for her brother William to come down to Upham and act as the god from the machine in the present crisis of Michael's business and domestic life. But after he had come, she felt that a rumbling lava-bed would have been more re-assuring than Mr. Costelow's presence as he sat in the dining-room with a handkerchief over his massy head and his large feet on a chair in front of him, raging because there was no telephone connection with Michael's house or office.

"No telephone," he bellowed, "no wonder you've got in such a mess, when there's actually no means of communicating with either Michael or his wife. Such unbusiness-like ways!"

Mrs. Strode laughed, as she went away to send a wire to Elise and look up trains, for Mr. Costelow wanted to see the fine lady wife that was causing all this commotion in the family. To his sister's relief he at last went out, intending while waiting for Mrs. Michael, to poke round and discover whether Upham boasted any old curiosity shops. For Mr. Costelow was gifted with an extraordinary capacity for lighting on the quaint, particular records of the past that are enshrined in old bundles of letters, in prints and portraits. It was commonly said of him that he knew more about the scandals of the half-great than any professed student of "ladies fair and frail" and a view of the inn where a royal mistress spent her childhood delighted him more than a mountain of papyri would have done. This morning,

ancient ghoul that he was, he found no half-buried *membra disjecta* of the heart and being consequently in a bad temper, refused so much as to look at the canal on which Michael had based so many far-reaching schemes.

"Canal," sniffed he, "I know what a canal's like. Seen plenty of 'em. But what I want to know, Cecilia, is how you came to be such a fool as to allow the boy to tie himself up like this. Politics, forsooth, who's going to let women meddle in politics when the one thing they have got in their own hands is the worst managed show in the whole set out?"

"And which is that, Billy?" asked poor Mrs. Strode humbly.

"Why, marriage, of course. Wife, what's he want a wife for? Plenty of women to be had without that fuss."

"Without her there wouldn't be any business at all, for you refused a penny for what you called his wild cat schemes. It's your fault, from beginning to end and nobody else's."

Altogether it was just as well that Elise arrived by the train chosen by Mrs. Strode. When the old man spied her from the dining-room window as she swam daintily up the path to the front door, Mrs. Strode heard him whisper ecstatically:

"Crickey! what a beauty!"

And before anyone else could get out to open the door, he was to be seen bowing like a courtly old exquisite over the small, grey-gloved hand she extended to him. The girl's delicate fineness struck Mrs. Strode, in the incense burnt before her by the old ribald, as a more beautiful attribute than she had ever before imagined. For it was clear that Mr. Costelow, originally inclined to regard Michael as the chief factor in the situation, had now given the centre of the stage to his wife.

"So," said he, "you're Michael's wife, my dear. You know I want to help both you and him, if I can, for I had a great deal to do with him when he was young."

Mrs. Strode sat smiling to hear the cooing sweetness of a voice that was popularly supposed to throw the telephone out of gear by its bellowing.

"Not that he's old now," he continued feebly, his mind evidently wandering off into a maze of bewilderment while Elise watched him with a faint gleam of teeth between half-

parted lips. It was not he, but she, who, after all, felt like the arbiter of destiny. Mrs. Strode fancied that she might be one of the disturbing elements and rose to leave the room. It was a relief to Mr. Costelow to be able to snap at someone again.

"Sit down, Cecilia," he barked. "Don't fidget me by going in and out. Now you're here, stay here. We're all in the same boat together, and a damned leaky old tub at that."

Elise looked at her mother-in-law gently as she said:

"Michael's mother has always understood a great deal of what I've had to bear."

And although Mrs. Strode could have beaten herself for the sensation, she felt as though an order of merit had been bestowed on her. In the quiet of her self-possession the girl who had clung to her child two nights ago appeared as the mistress of the situation.

"She has been very good to me," she continued, while Mr. Costelow looked up sharply with the quick glance that was his business look. How much of this gracious friendliness was acting, he asked himself. Then her delicate charm with its miniature-like finish disarmed his suspicious mind.

"Mr. Costelow," said she, leaning forward suddenly, "let me put my side first. It's the woman's side that's been put last since the Garden of Eden, but this time I must speak. When I married, my money was put in the foundry, because we thought, my mother and I, that it would be a good investment. It has been all we fancied."

"Then, thanks to Michael, you're a rich woman," said Mr. Costelow, admiring the self-possession of a woman who could take up the cudgels on her own behalf. He had heard of scenes and feared hysteria.

"Yes," said Elise gravely, "that is true, but now he not only proposes to use my money for a purpose with which I have not the smallest sympathy, but actually to give over all the capital of the Works, including mine, to the men. Now, Mr. Costelow, would you, wife or no wife, consent to this?"

"Damned if I would," said he frankly.

Elise permitted herself a flicker of the eyelids in the direction of Mrs. Strode, who moved restlessly in her chair.

"Now," continued Elise, "I'm a rich woman, as you say, but how do I live? In a tumble-down cottage where it's never quiet by day for the roar of the Works. I'm awakened at six like any workman's wife and *my* curtains get as black as any of those down *their* streets. I see no one all day, for I can't make friends in such surroundings. Now, why should I live like that?"

Seeing the sympathy in her brother's face, Mrs. Strode got up, unable to remain still any longer.

"Elise," she said sharply, "there's another side."

"There is," said the girl, speaking fiercely for the first time. "I've only one life to live like everyone else. I've a head and I've looks and I've energy. Why should all I am and have be sacrificed to these plans of Michael's? Why should Michael do what he likes with everything I have, decide everything, come always first?"

"You should have thought of all this before you married him," said Mr. Costelow, tapping her smartly on the arm. "Michael crowed loud enough and anybody could see a wife would have to be the fifth wheel of the coach with him. She'd never be able to get up and drive which, I take it, is what you want to do. Why don't you use your brains to help him?"

"I," laughed Elise, panting a little, "his secretary in a drab dress, or perhaps an overall, with the smut spoiling my skin! Haven't you learnt yet that nature, when she makes a woman, writes her purposes all over the woman's body?"

"Well, a brace of twins," he began, till Mrs. Strode looked at him with an expression that suppressed even Mr. Costelow's truculence. Turning to his sister he said savagely: "Well, what have you got to say to that? Isn't there an answer to what she says?"

"Yes, there is," said Mrs. Strode. "There is, but Elise doesn't know it."

"Then tell her."

"It's the way my husband taught me. Oh, I know what those first years are, pent up in a little house when she wants to be out and about, as he is, in the give and take of the world outside. I know how one hates at first the miserable walls that shut one in. I've been through it. All women

of brain do. I wanted to be a doctor, but I only married one and so I had to cook dinners and nurse babies and make beds. Michael's father taught me in the end, for there's an old way called love that leads to more sweetness than selfishness."

"Michael never taught me," said Elise softly. "And so you got contented, quiet?"

Mrs. Strode nodded.

"Dead, in fact," said Elise frankly. "Well, I absolutely refuse to die by inches for any man to whom I'm so little as I am to Michael. And this is exactly what you told me to do yourself, not a fortnight ago. What's made you want me to sit on the fence now, when you were so fierce for me to get off?"

Mrs. Strode was silent, for she herself hardly knew her own reasons, which were compounded largely of a realisation of all the ruin such a move on Elise's part meant to Michael.

"I know," cried Elise, with a sudden inspiration. "You hate to think that you and my mother should feel the same about this."

And it was partly true, for Mrs. Strode felt herself indeed a devil's advocate when she was obliged to sit on the same bench with Madame Lesueur.

"Anyway," continued Elise, "I mean to kick over the traces, just as Michael did when he left his mother and sister to shift for themselves as well as they could."

"For a big purpose," said Mrs. Strode hotly, "not for a personal caprice, because he was too cowardly to put up with a little discomfort."

The clock ticked noisily in the pause that followed.

"You oughtn't to have said that, Cecilia," said Mr. Costelow at last.

"Oh, let her say it. I'm sorrier for her than anyone. And she's right. I *am* too cowardly. I asked for a house, for society, for something of interest to me. And I can't have it, that's the plain truth, unless I go."

"It can be managed. I guarantee it. I'll speak to Michael," exclaimed Mr. Costelow.

"And do you really think I would take after your entreaty what he wouldn't grant to mine?"

When she had left by the next train, the old man sat a

long while after his return from the station, musing over his pipe.

"She'd better go, Cecilia," he said at last. "They're too far apart for any joining now. But what a fool that boy is!"

"Then Michael's ruined, I suppose," said Mrs. Strode in the dull voice with which one greets the inevitable.

"He can raise a mortgage. From me, at the market rate. I believe in him as a business man, though for imbecility with a woman I shouldn't think the four seas had his like."

"Bless you, Billy!" she exclaimed. "But, oh, if you'd only done it before!"

"Now was there ever anything so maddening as a woman like that?" he asked, much wrought upon. "Can I help it if you put the first touch to the family's downfall by marrying Strode? And there's this canal business he talks of. I'll go into it with him. Gad! he's a fellow for big ideas and yet the most blasted idiot that ever crawled. Well, he'll suffer and I hope he may."

"So will she. For how is a woman like that going to live, away from her moorings as she'll be?"

While Mrs. Strode was silent, brooding in dismay over this new aspect of things, he burst out again:

"But I'm glad I've seen her. She's a type, the ripe, little, melting cuss, that's getting scarcer every year. They don't run to it, the lean, scraggy, eye-glassed women you see nowadays. They may be philosophers and they may be Prime Ministers for all I care. They're good enough for that kind of work. I wouldn't give a brass farden for one of that lot. But this is the rarest type out, the sort that men used to make for themselves, just as they made pictures or poems or fine gardens—only now they seem to have lost the knack of it. The world's not what it was," sighed this hoary old sinner.

"What type?" asked Mrs. Strode curtly.

"The type, my dear, that ruffled it at Versailles, or thereabouts, in the days before the dirty *sans-culottes* swept the Grand Monarque into the pit. The pretty darlings who come down to us now in a fragrance as faint as it is penetrating."

"Billy, you're mad. Are you speaking of my son's wife?"

"Well, no, I wasn't. But she reminded me of them, the beauties."

He began a list and at every name Mrs. Strode's hair bristled, for his knowledge of the by-paths of folly was extensive and peculiar and by no means began or ended with Ninon de l'Enclos or the Pompadour.

"Billy," she shrieked at last, "do be quiet. You're a perfect ghoul. Can't you see what I must be feeling while you go on like this? For, after all, Michael is responsible for her, say what you will."

"Lord, my dear, he didn't make her."

This reflection was Mrs. Strode's sole consolation in these dark days, though she, like everybody else, over-estimated Elise's lightness and under-estimated her brain, by one of the many misunderstandings through which beauty pays toll of compensation to its plainer sisterhood.

CHAPTER XI

A POINT IN CASUISTRY

After the crisis Michael felt a certain relief, as though an ambushed foe had at length come out into the open. For, almost unknown to himself, he had vaguely presaged his wife's opposition, yet when it came he none the less felt as though the tool in his hand had suddenly assumed a volition of its own.

Now, as he sat in the private parlour of the Fox and Hounds at Efford looking out on the wood-girt fields and garden where he had spent his honeymoon, he tried in vain to feel himself the same man who had lived through the constant intimacy of those unforgotten days. The girl he had understood, but the woman, though the mother of his son, seemed an entire stranger. A dull stupidity rose to irritation as he realised his own powerlessness; he felt a fighter with the wind, vainly grasping at shadows.

Yet she had lured and repelled, till he railed at the power of woman who either enslaves or brutalises by the goad of desire, or pettily chaste, divorces herself from nature and becomes an empty idol at whose temple doors a man may knock in vain. Elise was the one unplastic thing that had ever come across his path and at one moment he wanted her gone, as one longs to see the back of one's failures. Yet she was worse than failure since she convicted him of the fault of meanness, that crime that stings even a mean man. He cursed the day that had brought a woman into what would otherwise have been a well-ordered life which moved straight to its goal.

Yet, even while he longed to efface her from his memory, he walked deliberately up the hillside to the church where Elise had once boldly plunged for the accomplishment of her purpose, realising as he did so that desire is no dowsing-rod which can be used to indicate the whereabouts of Lethe's springs.

That night he went down to Mrs. Strode at Upham.

"I was wondering when I was going to see you," said his mother grimly, as soon as she cast eyes on him in the doorway.

There was no sweetbread or Burgundy for him, though the setting of the scene was the same as when Elise had flown like a stormy petrel to this nest. Taking up the cat as she sat down opposite her son, Mrs. Strode began to smooth its fur backwards. Since it was a frosty night, electric sparks ought to have been generated by the action, especially considering the condition of the human conductors.

"So this," said Michael, "was what was brewing when you took Elise up to London?"

He spoke sullenly and Mrs. Strode was not going to endure that from a man who had driven his coach and horses over a precipice.

"There's nobody on earth," cried she, releasing the angry cat in order to allow more room for gesture, "that's answerable for this except yourself. Unless I am," she added, with a sudden *volte face*.

Michael stared, for he had expected quite a different ending to her sentence.

"For," she said defiantly, "I gave you spoon meat before you were ready to leave your bottle. You've always been too previous; mapping out the boundaries of the Promised Land before you'd so much as seen a grape that came out of it. And accordingly, here you are talking about partnership with thousands of men, you that can't co-operate peaceably with one woman! If social reform means anything, it means getting the best out of everybody and not drilling them like so many automatons. Your wife's turned on you and shown it can't be done. I hope it'll be a lesson to you."

"It isn't like you to round on a man."

"You've driven her to it, Michael," said Mrs. Strode paying no heed to him. "She was a girl who wanted *petits soins* and you have no more idea of *petits soins* than a steam thresher has. A wife like Cecily would have suited you better, for she'd have made you a god and if you were hard on her, she'd just have thought the brand of incense she

burnt didn't suit you. But Elise! It was hopeless from the first."

A change was coming over Michael; his mother's vaticinations put a back-bone of obstinacy in him. Lifting his head, he cried:

"By Heaven, I'll not give her up. She's mine. I'll make a fight for it."

"And there," retorted Mrs. Strode, wagging her forefinger at him, "has been your mistake from the first. She never *has* been yours, for a man may trumpet 'to have and to hold' till he's black in the face, but a woman never belongs to him unless he's the very biggest thing in the world to her. And you're big, Michael, but you're not bigger than adulation, than power, than luxury, than beauty. There are a good few things in the world, besides you, my son. And the deuce of it is that Elise knows it. She mightn't have seen it quite so clearly, perhaps, if you'd only given her whatever she asked for. It's a prescription that isn't often tried with a woman, but it's wonderfully effective, that."

"I'll not give her up," repeated Michael, feeling the essence of his mother's remarks too volatile for his male comprehension.

At that moment the front door opened and Cecily crossed the hall to the room where they were sitting. Mrs. Strode rose and remarked drily to her son:

"You remind me, Michael, of a little story I heard long ago. There was once an old country parson who was showing the Bishop round his parish and when the Reverend Father in God said to him, 'I trust that when I come next year I shall not find God's Acre planted in potatoes,' the old man said, 'not such a fool as that, my Lord, for 'twill be turnips next year.' But he was mistaken for—he was planted himself there, long before next year. I fancy it's you who'll be planted, and not Elise. For you've got bigger things agin you than you realise, just as that poor old parson had."

"I cannot," struck in Cecily, "pretend to understand you, mother. You appear to be siding with Elise against Michael."

"It isn't a mother-in-law's part, you think?" asked Mrs. Strode.

"It's the scandal I think of. That people will know is too horrible. I can't believe it, it's more like a nightmare than anything else. But such things come of marrying beneath one."

"So you think," said Michael, as the three gathered round the fire in the true Christmas Supplement style, "you think, like all good people, that it isn't what's done that matters, but what is known."

"Oh, you always talk as if black were white!"

"And you, my dear Cis, always like everything a decent grey. But, after all, you know, it's only when a thing is anti-social that it's wrong. And are you sure that the separation of husband and wife is always anti-social?"

"It's a bad example," said Cecily firmly.

"Not so bad as many marriages that imply secret dishonour. One of the best things of the new age is the coming out into the open, the cutting short of the old lies and hypocrisies."

"And you can talk about the new age when this horror is coming on you! Michael, I don't believe you are sane."

Mrs. Strode pursed up her lips; she felt much better now that the dispute had got into the abstract. "Anti-social," she said doubtfully, "so that's to be the criterion, is it? Well, it cuts wider than you allow, perhaps, for everything that weakens a man's own character must be anti-social, since it lessens his use to the community."

Cecily threw up her hands.

"You two," she cried, "would argue if the earth were closing on you—as to whether it was an earthquake or——"

Words failed her.

"A seismic vibration," laughed Mrs. Strode, who would have been amongst the gayest of the aristocrats to tread a gallant measure at the wine-feast of La Guillotine.

Michael understood; he laid a hand on her arm.

"Mother," he said, "don't be angry with me."

"No," she cried softening, "you betray the mettle of the pasture too clearly and I had a good deal to do in making you what you are. But I do wish you wouldn't go head downwards at everything so—so bullishly."

Cecily watched this interlude with angry glance. Then

it appeared that she had only come in to say that Philippa Halliday, who had been spending the Saturday afternoon in Upham, could not come in to supper, but must return at once. So it came about that Michael and Philippa travelled back to Exminster together. On seeing them off, Mrs. Strode was struck with a new idea.

"Jacob," said she, "may have wanted Rachel, but he seems to have had no objection to Leah—as a stop-gap. I wonder which is the bridge that breaks down quickest when a man and woman get on it to try to meet—body's attraction or mind's. Heigh-ho! But I like Elise best, for she's the biggest sinner. But Philippa has a hungry eye. She never had much, poor girl, to get fed up on. But I'd hate to see Elise snuffed out quite so thoroughly."

Thus, after the manner of her sex, Mrs. Strode wanted to have, and yet to have not. Consequently she entirely forgot, in her preoccupation with the domestic side of Michael's affairs, that she had never mentioned to him Mr. Costelow's offer to advance the required money on a mortgage.

It was not until he found himself sitting alone opposite Philippa in the first-class carriage that Michael himself recalled the fact that the crisis in his financial affairs was as important as the hitch in his marital relationship.

The air quick with unspoken thoughts, he lay back for a few minutes with his hand over his eyes. Then at last, bending forward to tap her knee, he said:

"Philippa, have you any faith in me left at all?"

"Why not?" she asked.

"You don't feel I'm a mere wind-bag, with all my schemes that never get any further than a draft on paper? Six, seven, how many years is it? And nothing done, except a bonus scheme that failed."

"What does that matter?" she cried. "See how much you've had against you. I should never believe even the evidence of my own eyes if they told me you weren't going on."

This was striking the note he always expected of her; the part of Mahomet's old wife may not be a picturesque rôle, but it has its advantages: there is an element of good wear about it.

"Yes," he said. "Yet, I've had a throw-back. I'm on

my beam ends. I don't know that the Works will even survive the blow."

Philippa tightened the clasp of her ungloved hands; she was listening so intently to the echo of his thoughts that she hardly heard his words. Yet she knew that his manner was changing. She felt, when he spoke of Elise, that she herself was a stranger to him, as she had not been when it was the mere future of the foundry that they discussed.

"My wife, as everybody knows," he said curtly, "is the capitalist in this concern. Now she withdraws her money. I don't know how or where it can be raised. Nor do I even know how much time I shall have in which to make the settlement."

Like a rat in a cage, Philippa's mind darted up and down. It was not of the business question that she thought, but of what lay behind it. For a moment her heart throbbed with joy at the thought that Elise had withdrawn the help she herself could not give. Then, feeling how mean her gladness was, she tried to disavow her secret impulse.

"Elise," said Michael speaking more naturally, "finds marriage a bond, and poverty unbearable. She gives me her ultimatum; either I abandon my scheme of co-partnership and live the ordinary rich man's life, or she goes from me, taking her money with her."

"And you choose?" she asked.

He laughed bitterly.

"What happiness would there be for either of us if I gave in now? Shouldn't I be something less than a man if I gave up everything I've fought for just at a woman's whim?"

It was better than she had thought, for Elise was going from her horizon and his.

"You don't wish me to be a coward now, do you?" he asked gently.

His appeal to her put a new face on the thing, till she felt herself dragging down the whole affair to the level of her most selfish instincts. He had not thought of Elise—she stumbled on the idea as on an obstacle in the dark—from a woman's point of view. Worst of all, he had never dreamt of the danger so narrowly averted, if averted it was, in the case of Dr. Lemprière. The words Philippa had

overheard rang out quite clearly now, as she stood by the open window, letting the rushing night wind play on her face. At last she turned to him again.

"Wait," she exclaimed hoarsely, "for you're choosing without seeing what you're about. You don't know everything."

Then she asked herself how it was possible to give away another woman's secret, even for the sake of that woman.

"What do you mean?" he asked curtly.

"It is your wife," she stammered. "Think, put her over against your scheme. Weigh what you're doing when you let her go."

"I have," he said sternly.

"No, no, you have not. Believe me, you have not. She is young, pleasure-loving, beautiful, a woman reared from the cradle to live for admiration. What must her life be if she leaves you?"

"She must be free, if she wants to go."

"Yes, but she won't be free legally. Don't you see that it isn't a question of you and your foundry, it's a question of her—possible ruin. Ruin that you must count yourself answerable for."

She was wringing her hands in the extremity of her doubts —doubts as to her own motives in whichever step she might elect to take, to keep silence or to speak.

"What is it that you have at the back of your mind?" he asked quietly. "For that there is something in this more than mere fancy, I'm certain."

Avoiding his glance, she repeated the words spoken by Dr. Lemprière which she had overheard, and in repeating, felt that surprise we all experience at our own meanness.

But, unwittingly, she had only put a spur to Michael's previous decision, for she had fed his vanity, since he felt that if indeed Elise had sent one man to the right-about, her husband's hold on her must be stronger than he fancied. She would come back, would only flutter a few paces from him, and then he could see himself magnanimously forgiving her.

While he was actually framing to himself his sentence of noble reconciliation, all he remarked was:

"So that explains Lemprière."

And Philippa was beating herself in the void she imagined her words had created round her, for Elise would stay; the co-operative foundry would be non-existent; Michael would be a smaller man than if he had never conceived a great idea.

Then to her surprise he laughed again.

"Who made women, Philippa?" he asked.

"Man," she answered bitterly. "You have the women you deserve, and every advance that makes women helpmates, not toys, you resist. Yet, you're so queerly made that whenever you come across a comrade in a woman you confess the comfort of her."

"I do now," said he gravely, "and during the next few months I shall want her help more than ever, for I believe that my wife, like everybody else, must learn by action and not be wound up to automatic perfection like a clock. 'Till death do you part' can't make her less than a responsible being."

"Then you mean to—let her go?"

"Certainly. Nothing you have told me makes the least difference."

So she had given Elise away for nothing. As Philippa was realising this, the train ran into the platform where in the next few moments there was decided in quick by-play the practical outcome of the step they had been dicussing so academically, like two schoolmen wrangling over a moot point.

For in the midst of the bustle attendant on the departure of the up-mail, surrounded by shouting porters and excited travellers, stood Elise. In a flash both of the spectators remembered how characteristic it was of her to be late, on this, the most momentous journey of her life. The guard was actually raising the whistle to his lips when Elise made for a carriage door and Philippa, with a woman's blind instinct to save from unknown danger, ran forward to stop her.

In the bright light Michael could see the pallor, the heavy blackness of his companion's eyes, as seizing her by the arm, he cried hoarsely:

"By God! Let her go. I'm not her gaoler."

So they stood for a second till at the carriage door Elise turned and in a wave of memory that blotted out foundry

and life-work, he saw only the beautiful oval of her face, the dark-lashed tenderness of her eyes.

Dashing forward as the train moved, Michael made a grasp for the handle of the door and missed it, while a group of station officials rushed forward to stop him. Elise leant out from the carriage window and as the long row of lighted windows flashed by him, Michael could see she was holding something in her hand. Suddenly there came a soft thud against his face, and he remembered that Elise had always thrown as straight as a boy.

The tail lights of the train were swinging away into the darkness and the wet swirl of the rainy wind was fluttering a few wisps of paper down the platform when he stooped to see what she had thrown.

It was Ned's rag-doll and as Michael took it up he understood the bitterness that had refused to keep the faintest reminder of the life-giving tenderness that once had been their most precious possession.

Part Three

CHAPTER I

CAPUARE

It was very still in the room, but through the closely curtained windows came the roar of London and the distant notes of a piano that sounded clear and bird-like, with something of the effect of a flageolet. From an ivory cornice over the door hung a portière of heavy yellow tapestry, the faded splendour of which suggested the richness of a church vestment worked in cloth of gold. On the panelled walls, without mirror or reflecting surface of any kind, was repeated the same note of dull gold that gave the room an air of sombre dignity. Mingling with the smell of pines from the logs held up by brass andirons there was diffused the scent of Neapolitan violets set about everywhere in Sèvres dishes on the Louis Quinze tables between piles of books bound in white vellum and monogrammed with the letters J. R. in old English characters. Scent, warmth, and the mellow sunshine of the hangings made a summer in the room, although the horizon outside was dense with the smoky purples of a winter sunset, while delicate mists, floating like pale ghosts in the open spaces, were laying invisible fingers on the branches of the trees in the Park that by morning would be found covered with glittering chain-mail.

The door opened and with the rustle of silk and lace there entered a slim woman in a silvery dress that spread in fan-like drapery from the shoulders. Closing the door behind her, she switched the light on above a picture that hung in an alcove between the great windows and the tiled fireplace. It was a study by Julius Olssen of waves saffron-tinted at the foam-crests and writhing in snake-coils of red-green. In it the painter had achieved the final triumph of art, that transformation by which nature is used as an instrument to create a vision beyond nature.

The turning of the light on that special picture was more

purposeful than are most trivial acts, for the processes of massage, bathing and fencing of the morning and the long sleep of the afternoon after which the nerves felt full-flushed with life and the skin satin-smooth, reached their fitting culmination in the mental refreshment derived from the pictures and books that made this gold-tissued room not merely charming, but mentally stimulating. Even more significant than the toning of the old-gold background with the bronze of Madame Jeanne's hair was the variety in style and subject shown by the pictures, which differed from one another as widely as the moods of a woman, of which, indeed, they were reflections. At last she crossed the room and flung up the window-sash letting the draught of frosty air play over her face while she drew in deep breaths of it. The act was almost fierce, as though she resented, even while she courted, the enervation of studied exquisiteness.

In the brighter light one could see more clearly the bands of plaited hair that encircled the head in a coronet. The face was free from make-up of any kind, save for a possible pencil touch or two on the eyebrows which one could not but feel as a delicate personal compliment, in that beauty should take such artist-pains to please.

The ten years since Elise had left her husband had been so complete a contrast to the first phase of her life that she scarcely seemed to have carried over into them the same personality. For with a clear purpose and a sufficiency of money, it had not proved hard to draw the stylus across the visible writing of the past, and the invisible she had ignored with all the power of a strong will. By the help of a school friend who had gone on the stage, she had by now gained a recognised position as an interpreter of a special feminine temperament. The Madame Jeanne Renouf of the play-bills was no great actress creating parts as diverse as the fates of women, but one who required to have her parts written round her and no doubt in time the public, that raved about her gestures and her tones, would desert her for a fresher beauty. At present, however, she was at the zenith of her career. Apart from the business of the stage, she devoted herself to what her friend Raymond Olivier called the art *capuare*, to luxuriate. By now she had succeeded in mak-

ing the whole world her Capua, for though but little of an actress, she was an artist in sensation who carefully bent herself to the task of keeping her powers of delight at their highest point of efficiency. Many times she had fled from some delightful experience, lest by repetition zest should be lost, for she deliberately avoided the mistake of hammering a joy till she stunned it, being perfectly aware that only a sordid memory remains of a pleasure greedily swallowed and that to watch the dull daylight lying across the hills once seen rose-tipped and glorious with dawn is to court satiety. Such restraint is more intellectual than sentimental, more sensuous than sensual, yet entirely selfish.

With a rustle of skirts and a whirl of flutter and noise came the first caller, a bouncing woman whose broad buckler of a face loomed out from a mass of white furs.

"Ah, my dear," she shrieked, "how perfectly heavenly to see you again! But I am dead, positively dead, with what I have gone through since I saw you last."

She gave two pecks at Madame Jeanne's cheek-bones and deposited her seven-hundred guinea Chow on the rug. It appeared that Madame Auriol had just returned from a triumphal procession through the States, which must have been fairly successful, since she allowed her hostess to read the press notices instead of retailing them aloud herself and giving a free translation in the process.

The company that gathered during the next hour was typical of the world that fancies itself the *primum mobile* of the universe, either in virtue of the cheap-jack mastery of patter or of the secure possession of gold-edged investments. It only differed from the usual drawing-room assemblage in the fact that the women played the *raconteur* almost as loudly and freely as the men, instead of listening with demure interjections as is their practice elsewhere. There were several comets present, in the person of a novelist who had written a book that had been denounced from the pulpit, and of a poet whose verses expressed the mystic profundity of his soul in stanzas that would not scan. One critic there was who, in his special department, had made himself a master to whose authority everybody bowed except his wife, but he was rather a fish out of water at a time when the

lightning flash is the god of the hour. It was a literary and artistic coterie representative of the time and very different from the greater literary circles of the past, since neither the man of affairs nor the politician formed a natural part of its make-up. Even the solitary scholar who had strayed into it, with his refined, thought-sharpened features, was evidently an alien type, for the others were men who are in middle life generally full-fleshed and over-fed in every sense of the word, with a habit of soul like that of the spoiled children who have sucked honey and sit licking their fingers after it, a trifle queasy in stomach and more than a trifle irritable in mind.

Rather removed from the rest of the company sat a man paying only slight attention to the sentences that caught his ear. Just in front of him were two women, one a gorgeous Queen of Sheba with a plume of ospreys as tremulous as an aspen and as voluminous as the falls of the Zambesi, and the other a demure blue-clad woman with Venetian red hair. The volatile and the demure were discussing their hostess.

"Where did she come from?" said the Queen of Sheba, pouting her lips and vainly trying to peer round the corner of her huge, tip-tilted hat. "Heaven knows! Anyhow, she's no more French than I am."

"Yet John Balmaine says she has the accent of a Marquise."

"Oh, John Balmaine! Who made him a judge of anybody's French? At any rate she wasn't at the Sacré Cœur as she says, for I've a niece there and I made a point of asking most carefully about it when I went over there in the fall. She's all eyes and attitudes. But of course men are men and Madame Jeanne knows how to play the woman to them."

"*Does* she? *Does* she? I'm not so sure of it. Look how cold she is on the stage and how she always fails in the *scène à faire*, when she has to fall back on passion."

"Just so. Cold, but calculating, the temperament, my dear, that men like better than fire. For if she only smiles they think what a conquest they have made."

Suddenly turning, the speaker caught a glimpse at her elbow of the man they had mentioned. She laughed and made room for John Balmaine on the sofa beside her.

"Put me in the next play," she said, "as backbiting my hostess. But where have you been all these months? One heard terrible tales of Central Asia or the North Pole."

"Much farther than that, dear lady, believe me. I've been among the wealth makers down in—Manchester. And I've come, bringing my sheaves with me."

"And your impression?"

"That contrast is the salt of life and that the philanthropists and the politicians and all the rest of the rabble are the true enemies of the people. Don't we enjoy our warm rooms just because there's a shivering wretch outside on the pavement and wouldn't my whiskey lose its flavour if I didn't know that there are fellows who can't get gin—or even bread? But thank God I shall be in the family vault before the levellers-up have made the earth unfit for sensitives like myself. Meanwhile I've snatched a little silhouette out of Cottonopolis just to record the present delicious state of social contrast so delightful to the happy pagan."

"Like yourself."

"And you, dear lady, too."

Looking at her small, shallow face he wondered whether it was really worth while that the toil of tens of thousands should go on, only to produce her like or his. So wondering, he pressed his hand over his mouth. It was an irritating gesture of his, for he was in the habit of making it when one knew by the droop of his eyelids that his face was expressing something to which one would like to have the key.

Short and fat as a tun, round-paunched and rosy as a sun-kissed apple, he showed when he laughed the strong white teeth with slightly projecting canines that indicated the gripping power of his nature. The pointed faun's ears were matched by a straggling, greyish goatee that had more than a little of the satyr in its sweeping waves. He had a musical ear for all rhythms, whether of life or of language, and a conscientious devotion to his art that had little of jealousy in it towards younger talent.

At length he found Madame Jeanne leaning back flushed with talk and laughter in the corner of a lounge, alone for the moment in the rapidly thinning room. Standing leaning over the side of the couch he said in a half-whisper.

"You had the manuscript all right, I suppose. Can you

possibly get it read to-night, do you think? I want to talk it over with you as soon as possible. Anyone staying on this evening?"

The glance of both shifted instinctively towards the corner where the tall, lissom figure of a youngish looking man bent over the laughing face of a girl.

"Raymond may possibly stay for half an hour," said Madame Jeanne, "but I can easily send him packing, if you wish me to get on with the manuscript."

She refused to answer the significant smile with which John Balmaine said good-bye.

At last, with a musical trail of tinkling silver and porcelain the maids carried away the tea-trays. The only guest left by this time was, as Madame Jeanne had expected, the rising young barrister, Raymond Olivier.

"You haven't congratulated me," he said, coming up to her as she leant back flirting idly with a fan. "You saw, I suppose, that there will probably be a bye-election at Middlesborough. Poor old Sir John can't last much longer."

"Your chance at length?" she said smiling. "My dear, I'm as glad as though it were my own."

"I knew you would be," he said.

Then they fell into the silence that is more full of friendship than words, while Olivier stared smilingly at the fire. His swarthy face with the hair already thinning on the temples changed indescribably with his smile and, as Jeanne caught a glimpse of the blue eyes that were such a surprise in his face, she saw his twentieth year flash in them, and the next moment his fifteenth. The prominent, sensitive lips quivered slightly and then hardened to the everyday look with which he had learnt to face circumstances.

Everything that Raymond Olivier possessed, save the brain and magnetism that were his birthright, he owed to his own hard struggle. The son of a northern manufacturer who had died bankrupt just at the moment when Raymond was starting in his profession, he had forced his way up by dint of sheer hard work and a brilliant mastery of words. Irresistibly attracted to politics, the time of guinea briefs had also been the period when he was serving his apprenticeship to Liberalism by devilling for a prominent publicist who desired a reputation for omniscience. The seat in

Middlesborough, as Jeanne knew, had been carefully nursed in Olivier's interests by his chief in return for the services he had rendered to the Liberal party.

With bright eyes and cheeks glowing like a girl's, she listened while he talked of his plans. For his point of view, in which the conflicting political interests were as pawns in the game of power, was one she could thoroughly understand. She liked the flashing of great names, the references to big cosmopolitan questions of high finance on her companion's lips, and mouthing the phrase "governing class" till she loved it better than the syllables of Mesopotamia, she forgot all about the humdrum lives on which it all rested. Of all the worlds she had known—the sad one where the shadows of poverty govern the fancy as they had done in Michael Strode's, the dingy middle-class where lives are grey with age-long tedium, or the devil-may-care of the butterfly world, this sphere of power was the one she liked best. She longed to reach it, even as one stretches arms to the blue hills of the Delectable Mountains, not knowing that the blue dream-world is always on the far horizon that is never reached.

And Raymond Olivier, with his worn, young face, his keen eyes and taut nature held the key of it all. He was going up. Rising impatiently, she went over to the fire and kicked a log that had rolled against the curb of the grate and was filling the room with smoke. Thirty-seven, with a life behind her—and a woman. Stretching her arms with the luxurious abandon of a baby, she yawned. Then turning, she saw him leaning forward, looking intently at her, as though he read her thoughts.

"Now," she said quickly, "you must go. I've a play to read for Johnny Balmaine and I must turn you out. Send me a wire if you're summoned to Middlesborough. And pray to the gods for a strong head."

Placing her hands on his shoulders, she stood on tiptoe and laughingly pushed him away.

When he had gone she took up the manuscript of *The Corner Stone* and began to read, lying stretched out on the lounge by the fire. Into the still air rose a thin trail of smoke from the cigarette between the fingers of her left hand.

CHAPTER II

THE PAST

SHE saw at once that the setting, a factory town in the Midlands, was entirely different from any Balmaine had used before and that the chief woman's part which he intended her to play was one she had never attempted to portray before. The fact surprised her, for she knew that Balmaine, like the real critics, had no high opinion of her capacities as an actress since, like most people who seek the bubble reputation even in the public mouth, she had a pretty fair idea of her real standing. She remembered now the words overheard by her one night:

"Madame Jeanne an actress! Madame Jeanne's too middle-class to undo her corsets and show the heart under them. *Au fond*, she's a pinched and tight-laced bourgeoise."

And here, in the play she held, Balmaine had shown her as she actually was—shallow, foolish, worldly, sensuous, yet one whose ignorance was her pardon. From disgust of Balmaine's knowledge of her she passed to admiration of his powers of analysis and finally to a sense of gratified vanity in the fact that he had found her sufficiently interesting to study in this way. For he had given her, what Middlesborough was going to give Olivier, a chance at last. Pressing her hand over her eyelids, as was her practice when she wished to visualise a scene, she tried to construct the stage setting that Balmaine had carried in his mind. Instead, her inward gaze refused to see anything but the shabby rooms in which she had lived with Michael. The manuscript fell to the floor by her side, while in a blinding flash the truth came home to her that, with circumstances and surroundings changed, *The Corner Stone* was the story of her inner life and Michael's. The husband in the play was a labour leader who demanded of his wife an utter devotion to the cause he had at heart, who ignored her likes and dis-

likes and only expected her to be his second self, to wait for times and seasons like the server in the Mass, to give time, talent, money, life itself, not to his political career so much as to his cause. This the wife had refused, so that neither the *Corner Stone* of his life nor of hers had ever been put in its place.

Slowly under closed eyelids the past re-created itself till, half with loathing and half with the thrill of mastery, she saw her part in the play, and her actual surroundings were not, for in the darkness she saw only that which had been. Trembling with eagerness, she hastily sat up and turning over the typed pages, quickly began to pencil the scenes that must be altered, often with the actual words that had been said sounding in her ears.

Yet at the bottom of her mind it was hatred of Balmaine that ruled her; he had not merely spied, he had forced himself into the very inner tabernacle of her nature and held up the mirror there. How had he known?

Staring into nothingness, she felt a wave of misery rise and flood her heart. To men like Balmaine, the men who came and went, she was something outside their own lives. She was only Jeanne Renouf with whom one played and jested, but with whom one never identified oneself. The essential loneliness of a lawless life overwhelmed her. And yet Balmaine knew her like this: beside a naked soul, a naked body is naught. She shivered, maid-like, at the revelation.

Later on in her own room, she gazed at her face in the glass; the dry furrows round her eyes had suddenly become visible to-night. It was so that she must look in the closing scenes of the play when the woman in it wanted to go back to the old rooms, the old frocks, even to the horrible red blouse she had hated so. When the maid had gone she went over to the locked bureau by the fire and took out a packet of letters, her wedding ring and a faded photograph of her boy. By now he would be a lad with delicate, boyish lips and a faint shadow of down on the upper lip. Had he still the waving auburn hair that she had given him, she wondered.

Yet it was not the boy she wanted; it was the tiny thing that had tugged at her breast. She would never have left a baby child as so many women did, sending them away to be

nursed by strange hands. Opening the front of her gown she gazed down at the body that had given Michael a child, at the bosom that the baby hands and lips had pressed, and as she gazed the tears splashed down.

She wanted to see Michael; he would stoop more than ever now, his coat would be unbrushed as usual and his face often lined and tired. Walking up and down in the fire-light, with bare feet clinging to the mossy surface of the Aubusson carpet, she measured this luxury against the homely comfort of Michael, to whom she had been wife, not mistress, nor fellow-mime, nor even *brave garçon* in this queer *mêlée* of the marionettes. She craved, as she had not craved for years, to hear the wind sweeping over the roof-tops of the foundry against her window while Michael lifted her to him in the strong cradling that is home to a woman, a curious blend of protection and passion and possession.

Possession: it was what she had always loathed: it was what she now desired.

Next morning John Balmaine was roused from sleep by the sharp ting of the telephone bell. It was Madame Renouf demanding that every engagement he had made should be put off, so that she could have a clear day for the full discussion of the play.

"Well?" asked he, entering the room a couple of hours later.

"Well?" she answered, feeling that reluctance to start on a long task which always disconcerts lazy people.

Balmaine watched her between narrowed eyelids as she paced up and down; he was quite aware of the mental complexity of the situation, though, of course, to the actual facts of her story he had no clue.

"Johnny," she said at last, "did you know how close you were sailing to the wind when you wrote *The Corner Stone?*"

"I thought I'd written a part to suit you," he said with a slow smile. "And that I was giving you your chance at last."

"Yes," she flashed, "a chance to put my own life on the stage."

"No?" he said, leaning forward. "Is that really true?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I'm not a mere playwright, I'm a seer." He

swelled with satisfaction at his own prescience. To prick the bubble, she said curtly:

"And you've got a great deal of it wrong. That's why I wanted to go through it. For, let me tell you, John Balmaine, I'm going to play this for all it's worth. It's my story, not yours, and we'll have no bungling about it."

Soon he found, as they turned the pages together, that his play was assuming a new form: whole conversations were taken out, changed, or interpolated, while she dictated in quick staccato tones that became shrill in the intensity with which memory was working. At last, with burning eyes and tired forehead, Jeanne rang for black coffee and they drank it with hands that groped for the cups and heads bent in pre-occupation over their task. Though Balmaine was using shorthand, he could scarcely keep pace with her lightning speed.

As the silvery chime of the old Sèvres clock struck four, she leant back in her chair and pressed her hands to her burning eyelids; the work was done.

"Good old Jeanne," he said, bending down for a moment over her. He watched her curiously, wondering at the queer drama that was going on behind that tired mask of a face. She must be fully forty, he reflected.

"Is he alive still—that man?" he asked, nodding towards the large table of fine damascene work on which the sheets of the play were scattered.

"I believe so," she said.

"Gad!" he cried, moving away, for he knew instinctively that the careless caresses she would have received with laughter at another moment would be unwelcome now. "And you remember it all like that?"

He was standing in front of a blazing picture of a bull-fight by Melville, but his eyes saw only the dull rooms where a woman counted sixpences out of a shabby purse and a man fought for his curiously unselfish purposes.

"Jeanne," he asked cruelly, "do you care for him still?"

In the quiet of the room he could hear her breathe quickly and rustle slightly. The sound of the silk set her teeth on edge and she sat motionless again, refusing to let him know what he had made her suffer.

"Would you go back to him, if he wanted you?" he repeated.

"*You* to ask me that question!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, that!" he laughed, trying to conceal uneasiness under an air of jest.

"Yes, of course. All in the day's work, mine—and yours, I suppose," she rejoined bitterly. "But Michael isn't of our world, you see."

"You hated your part, I suppose, at first," he said, changing the subject, as he imagined, tactfully. "Yet I haven't the slightest doubt that it'll be quite the biggest thing you and I have pulled off together."

"Yet I can scarcely see myself playing it all the same," she said, turning to her professional side with a quick spurt of interest.

"Yes, you can—and it's just because you *do* see the thing and don't like the sight that you feel reluctant. See here! you've made yourself a charming society woman and you take that person on to the stage. But in this I've given you a part that will bring out what's buried in you. And, mind you, the buried part has to come out if you're ever to be an actress. Damn it all, Jeanne, don't you know yet that no artist can afford to turn his back on anything that's human? Why, to get one scene in that play right, I picked vermin off myself for a week."

"And you're asking me to do something now that's harder than to pick vermin off myself."

"Anyway, you've got to do it. I'm wrestling with the angel for a blessing—and I don't let go, not if I know myself."

"Oh, I shall play it," she said nonchalantly. "I suppose you, like the rest of them, have always wanted to know where I came from. Well, I'm not a *gamine*, but I was born on a small Jersey farm and my mother became the well-known Madame Lesueur of Bond Street, who died last year leaving a fortune big enough to be noticed in the press. From her I got my money and the greater part of my life I spent with business offices and foundry fires all round me."

She leant forward with her hands clasped round her knees, probing a bitter sensation. For, despite all the cultivation, mental and bodily, of the last years, she knew that no knowledge of Renaissance art, of old Sèvres, or lace,

no exquisite fruit of the world's ease could ever make her the true *grande dame*. Jeanne's spirit, if not her thoughts, still clung to the narrow passages and linoleum-floored rooms where she had lived. For the moment she hated Balmaine for seeing in her not the artist, gutter-born but with instinctive mastery of the basic passions, the nude realities on which the house of life is founded, but a mere bourgeoise, quick only with the narrow cares of the narrowest existence ever invented for the trammelling of poor humanity.

Yet, in the play, as her mind visualised it, she remembered how the poor fettered soul she was to depict at last awoke to a power that lifted her story into the region where, whether in the tedium of toil, or the foam of pleasure, or the darkness of the abyss, the heart is searched by a lightning vision of the truth that lies below all forms of social convention. The curious problem came to her in the doubt whether, if she could play the part on the stage, she had not also the energy to act so in real life. Balmaine put it for her.

"You have never given all of yourself," said he, "to anyone, to man, woman, or child, have you? There has always been one person in the world who must have first place and that is—Madame Jeanne. In the play you see I have made you give yourself at last."

"Yes," said she gravely. "I wonder if I can play it so."

Jeanne was one of the people who, stolid in the presence of life, become quick and sensitive when a situation or a character is revealed by art, and in the flood of light thrown over her by *The Corner Stone* she saw a bitter vision of herself. She knew enough of the world to recognise that it is not an act in itself that condemns a woman, but the circumstance of it. The brief passionate episodes of her artist life had seemed so unimportant until to-day that she had almost forgotten them until, like corn-seeds long hidden in the swathing bands of a mummy, they sprang to life in the sunshine. Covering her eyes with her hands she saw herself so clearly that she seemed to see with eyes that were not her own.

So Marie found her when she came to warn her mistress that it was time to dine and get ready for the theatre. Yet once Jeanne had found it delightful to know that people wondered and whispered about her and her adventures.

CHAPTER III

THE SNARES OF THE SIMPLE

"WHY, what's in the wind now?" cried Mrs. Pym, holding a smoking piece of bread at the end of a toasting fork.

"I'm all of a tremble," answered her visitor, closing the door of the Pyms' living-room as carefully as though a nervous invalid were asleep in the house, instead of John, whose healthy snores could be heard from the room overhead. It was Sunday afternoon and only courting Upham was abroad, close-bound in linkèd silent sweetness.

"And yet in general," said Mrs. Pym frankly, "you'm a pretty hard case that takes a death as easy as your dinner. But that's always the way with your tough ones; you never know when they'll knuckle up. I reckon when the day of judgment comes along 'twill be the poor twaddling things, as have all their life been afraid of black beetles, that'll answer up peartest to the trump. But whatever is it, my dear?"

Coming closer on tightly gartered waddling legs, Mrs. Elias Wannell put her rosy face up to Mrs. Pym's and whispered:

"There's another letter come for Miss Bowcher. I had it from Miss Short up at the Post Office this morning. It's Elise Lesueur's handwriting, as bold as brass, and it's got Coronet Theayter on the envelope, and the postmark London."

Mrs. Wannell's small bead eyes glistened like a ferret's and her elastic corkscrew curls twitched vigorously on each side of her face as, making little quackings with her lips, she enjoyed all the pleasure a *grande dame* feels when she gives away a State secret. The very pathway of her wide pink parting twinkled.

"That makes the third," said Mrs. Pym sombrely. "It's a sure thing, then. Her's took to the public line and has

been at it all these years, but first-long her took good care to use plain envelopes. Now her's got careless like. Well it beats cock-fighting and with all that money from her mother, too! But I hold it very kind of 'ee, my dear, to ha' put me up to it, me being so close connected with the family and that."

Having done a truly generous deed, like a hen who shares a juicy worm, Mrs. Wannell, the hostess of the Lighter Inn, accepted buttered toast and drank a cup of thickly sweetened tea with condescending zest.

"Do'ee think her husband knows?" said she. "What a thing to get about, his wife a common play-actress. Why, I wouldn't have one of they sort come in, not to keep the baillies out, a-traipsing round looking for lodgings of a Sunday night, all long flounced in the petticuts. You can tell one o' they gentry at a glance."

Mrs. Pym was alarmed, for she felt herself almost in the position of an old retainer of the Strode family.

"Not a word to another soul, Mrs. Wannell!" she exclaimed. "This," she added, drawing herself up, "must be kept on the quiet. For, what's there to go upon in the flap of an old envelope? If you go about gabbing, you may find yourself facing a judge and jury, afore you know where you are."

"And I hope, Martha Pym, that I wouldn't demean myself wi' putting tongue to such a tale. A play-actress isn't a thing I should as much as mention to anybody but a lady. Nor would Miss Short—a very respectable young woman. I should as soon think o' talking of garters to a gentleman as take the word between my lips, Martha Pym."

"Tchuh, tchuh," snapped Mrs. Pym, "you'm mighty perjinck all of a sudden. And I reckon there's a good few gentlemen as know what a play-actress is. But to think of us down here knowing nothing about it all these years, and her down here so constant in days gone by! I'm sure, my dear, 'tis very creditable of 'ee to ha' been the one to follow the thing up."

"But what I can't stomach," said Mrs. Wannell, returning to affability once more, "is that sly-faced puss S'lina Bowcher, going about as prim-faced as you please and subscribing to the church expenses double so much as her

ought to by good rights for her station—and all the time her own blood-niece isn't fit to go into a decent body's house."

When her visitor had gone Mrs. Pym sat twiddling her thumbs in great enjoyment. She felt as happy as a dramatist who has struck a rich vein of incident, and thrilling at the situation, she longed impatiently for the next act.

It came to her in the guise of a bold plan, a plan that set her rubbing the thinning locks on her forehead with great gusto. Unfortunately, however, the successful carrying of it into execution called for a coadjutor and there was no one who could possibly be employed but her husband.

"For," as she was wont to remark, "though men's no good for planning and that, they've got eyes and legs anyway and us may so well make use of such parts as *be* useful in 'em."

With Mrs. Pym the act always followed hard on the thought and going to the foot of the stairs, she bellowed in the bosun's voice that had aroused him from slumber for the last forty years:

"John, get up, you slug-a-bed."

"Yes, Martha," came faintly at last, well smothered in blankets, but followed by a promising thud.

It was not, however, until she judged him to be mellow, that is, until he had reached his third cup of tea, that she told him of Mrs. Wannell's surprising news. Then she continued:

"I'm fair set on getting to the bottom of this, for it's broke my proper rest for the last ten years, not knowing what's come of that Elise. Never did I know anybody go out so clean as her did. In bad illnesses and troubles o' that sort, you've got all the bustle of blisters and cuppings to keep 'ee up, but when a body goes snap like that, you don't feel you've been treated fair. Now what I want you to do is to go up and find this here theayter and set down there in front of it and see if 'tis Elise as acts there. You've been a sailor chap and by your own telling inside queerer places than theayters and you've been up Londonways on excursions and that, often enough. And come to think of it now, there's one on this very Monday. And I've got a clean shirt aired and there's nothing terruble pressing to shop."

"I dunno that there is," said John, "but it do shake a man up to be druv same as this. Not but what 'tis a bit of a spree, too, tracking down a fine little-piece of goods like her. Makes 'ee feel a proper 'tec, it do."

"And mind I shall 'spect 'ee back Tuesday morning," said Mrs. Pym sharply. "I wish I'd got more spunk in my legs, for then I'd ha' gone too. For 'twill be quivery, quakery and no mistake, watching to see if her does walk on. You'll mind, won't 'ee, John, that her'll be all painted up. I wonder, now, if you'm to be trusted not to make a mull of it."

In alarm lest she should propose to accompany him, John began a wild tale in connection with his former pursuits of such wild deer as this Elise. But Mrs. Pym cut him short.

"'Tis proper enough talk for a bar-parlour, John," said she, "but 'tidn't no treat to me."

Next day after he had gone, she settled herself for a delightful meditation in the old chair, for with such a thrill of tragic mirth do our most painful moments supply the world that we should all be distinctly poorer without each other's pains.

Ere long, deep breathing from the arm-chair stole through the dusty room. At length a long-legged chicken peeped in at the door and giving a squawk of alarm fled, crumbless and unsatisfied, at a sudden snore that woke the sleeper and set her bolt upright just in time to catch a glimpse of the chicken's leg disappearing out of the door.

She became aware of short, sharp bursts of sound, like the roar of imprisoned beasts. It came across to Monmouth Street from the football field and reminded her, as she lay in a half doze, that her house might shortly be invaded by a starving, mud-caked visitor, ready to devour cakes, jam, eggs, bacon and any other trifle that happened to be lying round. Also he dearly loved a bloater, and one of the reasons why, on the whole, he preferred Mrs. Pym's house to Granny Strode's was that the fare at the former was more savoury and the manners more easy.

"I'll just pop up to shop and get a hard-roe bloater," said Martha, softly doating in her old woman's way on that

long-legged fellow, Ned Strode, who at this time very much resembled, as to limbs, the fowl that had just disturbed her slumbers.

Her forebodings were right this afternoon, for not long after the football roars had ceased she heard the three whistled notes outside the house that had been his father's signal long ago. She hurried to open the door, revealing behind her the amply spread table that had a habit of arising in the wilderness before Master Ned, whenever there were any women about.

"Good," cried he, and flinging his great-coat off, he came up to Martha and gave her a frank hug.

Master Ned was undoubtedly a very pretty fellow indeed, on whom no woman could look for two minutes without feeling his smile worming its way luringly into her heart. It was noticeable that even Mrs. Strode's sternness entirely departed from her when she actually beheld with her bodily eyes the crispy locks, "crulle as they were laid in presse," the impudent nose, the frank, dog-like eyes that seemed to speak to each person of a mystery peculiar to those two alone, to Ned and the person he smiled on.

Yet to-night there seemed something on his mind, as drawing John's chair up to the fire after tea, he sat in his grandmother's Buddha-like attitude, his bare knees jutting crag-like towards the blaze.

"Pymmie," he said at last, "I want you to tell me something. You've known all about our family for years, haven't you?"

"There isn't much about 'ee I don't know," said Martha. "You've heard me tell 'ee forty times, if I have once, how your father worked here with John, afore he got so up in the world. A powerful sweater he was, too," she added meditatively.

"Yes, I know. But 'tisn't about him. It's about my mother."

Mrs. Pym was just on the point of lighting the lamp, but at this she laid aside the glass she was holding and sat down quickly.

"She isn't dead, though they wanted me to think she was," he went on quietly. "I've known it for some time. I fought a cad from the foundry about her once and knocked

him down for what he said. But I never told anyone, though 'twas years ago, before I went away to school."

"Do 'ee remember her, my dear?"

"Yes, in bits, I can. Clearest is her coming up to the old garret at home, where I used to keep my mice. There was a sunbeam right across the room and she stood in it. And she shrieked out when I let the mouse run up my hand. She seemed very small."

He could not find words for the impression, but he probably meant shadowy, though strange to say he could see plainly even now the sunshine on the white-washed projecting jamb of the ceiling and could smell the mingled scent of hoarding apples and caged mice.

"And did 'ee never say anything to anybody about what you—fancied?"

"I did once, to Philippa Halliday. I asked her what my mother died of. And she said of too much life. At first, I thought she must have meant fever. I puzzled over it for years. But I know she isn't dead. Is she now?"

Mrs. Pym, being hard put to answer, shook her head in a manner that might mean anything or nothing.

"It's no good me telling up old crams," she said at last, "I dunno whether she is or no and that's the plain truth."

"She and father parted when I was a little chap?"

Mrs. Pym nodded. Then she asked curiously, "Why did 'ee fight that chap, my dear?"

The boy rose and began to fidget with the china dogs on the mantelpiece.

"He was a liar and I broke his teeth for him," said he at last, evidently feeling that there was a merit in suiting the punishment to the offence.

"She couldn't stand the beastly Works," he broke out, "and neither can I. Works! Why we eat, drink and sleep Works down at our place. And I ought to have gone to college, instead of having to sit at a cursed desk all day. If 'twasn't for Louis Aviolet I'd have cut and run long ago. It's only because father thinks I shall do my work better if I keep myself fit that I'm able to get off for a match."

"Yet your father played half-back for his county times upon times," said Mrs. Pym reproachfully.

"Oh, I know. But he must have been different then.

Why, old Emma left the door of the room that used to be theirs open one day, you know, hers and father's, and I looked in. It was all over lace and silk. He must have been quite another sort then, if he let her have a room like that. And I've seen her portrait at Granny Strode's."

"You'm like her; you've her hair and eyes. And when you was a little chap, you was the image of her."

"However did she and father come together?"

"Oh, as to that, you never can tell what 'tis that brings a couple so far as *wilt thou have.* I'd never ha' took John if it hadn't ha' been that he turned hisself into a door mat. I was in service then up to Bank and I went up to master and says to 'en: 'Plaise, sir, will 'ee come down and send away old John Pym? I've refused 'en dree times as 'tis and he says he'll sit there all night if I don't have 'en. What be I to do, sir? Will 'ee come down and send 'en away?' But *he* wouldn't come down and John wouldn't come up, so I had to take 'en."

But Ned was not to be diverted from his own affairs.

"I don't believe father can have understood what he was doing when he let her go," said he.

"I reckon none of us do, when us acts wrong," said Mrs. Pym, voicing the creed of mercy. "But perhaps somehow us gets the chance some day to make up for it. 'Tis poor telling for all of us, if we don't."

"Then you think he did wrong?" asked Ned quickly.

"Mazed or drunk, or clean or dirty," said Mrs. Pym sternly, "'tis one bed and one board for a decent woman and her man till one of 'em's coffin-ripe—or so it ought to be."

"And," said she, when the boy had gone, "I never had to say a word about the play-actressing, praise be. But what a mad thing 'tis for all of 'em to let that boy go to find out from strangers what wouldn't come easy for 'n to hear, even from a friend. 'My dear soul, it do seem the more high-learnt you be, the bigger fule you make yourself when you tackle a plain job."

The boy, in truth, found his teeth set on edge with a sort of pre-natal irritation that was instinctive, not rational, at being set in the midst of the incessant sounds and sights of labour, from which there was no escape all the hours of the day. Born with inherited instincts for clear colour, for

fine shapes, for measured sounds, he was given only the energy of the fire, the brick outlines of factory sheds and the roar of machine hammers. In his mind, jangled like a violin whose strings have been tampered with by demon hands, the internal conflict that had spoilt the lives of his father and mother before his birth, had cropped up as a deep, unreasoning disgust of the swarming millions whose blatant noise and vulgarity is only a passing annoyance to stronger minds. He felt himself a passenger with a first-class ticket forced to travel in the dusty welter of the third-class and hated his fellow-passengers the more for this difference in the marking of their tickets.

At six o'clock next morning Mrs. Pym hurried herself into a weird collection of garments and bundled down over the box-like staircase to set a match to the fire. For she had laid strict injunctions on John to return by the night excursion and, in fact, had only doled out enough money for a day-trip and a meal or two.

Presently she heard his stumbling footsteps coming down the street and whisking to the door pulled him into the room in the twinkling of an eye.

"Her's there, right enough," bellowed Pym.

"Hush! hush! you great gackum," said she, clapping the door to hurriedly, and locking and bolting it. "Do 'ee want the whole town to know what you've been up for?"

"Well, you needn't cut me up so short," grumbled he, "for I never seed a soul coming down street *to* hear what I'd got to say, unless 'twas an old tom-cat. And my head's tored to bits and I'm as empty as a drum."

"But you seed her?" cried she, hastily beginning to chop potatoes in the pan over the fire.

"Ay, I seed her. First-long, I had a bit of a meal and 'twasn't a bad little sit-down neither, rump steak and kidney pie and I had two helpings and a cup or two of coffee."

"Get on, John, do. I know how many helpings you had. Haven't I knowed it for forty year? Get on to where you saw her."

"Well, as I said, after I'd fed a bit, I had a word or two with a copper and got upon a 'bus. And so I got there and

'twadn't so far neither, though I took two, dree wrong turnings the first go off. And there her was."

"Where?"

"Drawed out as large as life outside the doors. Dressed up and undressed and every sort of dress, but 'twas her and no mistake. Only it didn't say Lesueur, nor Strode, it said that."

He produced a dirty piece of ruled paper, apparently torn from an account book.

Mrs. Pym spelt the words out slowly:

"J-e-a-n-n-e R-e-n-o-u-f. Outlandish!" said she.

"Yes," agreed he, "I planked it down on a bit o' paper I got from a nice young woman in a bar near by and her told me that my lady's all the rage now, though her wasn't thought much of till about a year ago. That's why it didn't get down here, I reckon."

"And what was her playing in?"

"I couldn't make head nor tail of it, though I'd stood mor'n an hour outside to see it, too. But 'twas her, and speaking all clipt-like as her used to do, only more so. Her looked youngish to start with, but by the end her might ha' come out of her coffin, with girt staring eyes. I couldn't make out what 'twas all about, but there was a fair old rumpus going on, and all about her."

"So it's true then," said Mrs. Pym solemnly. "Play-actress her is—and that boy not to know what his mother's doing! My dear soul, 'tis a pretty house of horrors we be in now."

Mrs. Pym had once read a novelette dealing with the Otranto-like adventures of a Lady Ermyntrude; hence the phrase of a bygone century.

"Not a word to a living soul, John," said she, "till I give 'ee leave."

"Now," cried he, calling the ceiling to witness, "that's you all over, that is. Give me all the work and all the worrit, and then take the pleasure yourself. Now, I warn there'll be a fine old tea-drinking soon and heads together and tongues going clip-clap, clip-clap, like any old tinker's mare that's got a shoe loose."

Soon there came from the room overhead two prodigious thuds and a series of sighs consequent on the relief ex-

perienced by feet being freed from twenty-four hours of best-boot torture. Peace fell upon John and he murmured:

"A nice little girl, that barmaid, and a deal better worth looking at than Madame."

Then he "put away an hour or two."

CHAPTER IV

A HARVESTING

"TUT, tut," said Mrs. Strode, tapping the rolling-pin smartly to get rid of the flour, "it's all this secrecy that's been the folly. If Bluebeard had given his wives a first-class funeral instead of chopping their bodies up small, he might have died a highly respected Town Councillor. But you were quite right to come to me about this affair of Ned, Mrs. Pym. I'm very much obliged to you and I'll talk to his father about it. Of course, we all ought to have guessed that he must have heard things about his mother."

It was in Cecily's pleasant Dutch kitchen, all white tiles and quaint brown "cloam," that Mrs. Pym had run the boy's grandmother to earth. Here Mrs. Strode was making Cecily's weekly supply of cakes and Mrs. Pym, who sat with her feet on the tall fender and her bonnet strings expansively flung back, was just drinking a cup of tea. For Louis was on the moor for the day and therefore his women were camping in the kitchen and lunching from a tray, while the maid took the children for a walk. It was, as Mrs. Strode often remarked, quite delightful to observe how irregular Cecily's habits had become under Louis's tuition.

"We're sitting on a stack of gunpowder barrels," continued Mrs. Strode darkly, "and have been for years. Oh, yes, Cis," she exclaimed, as she caught sight of her daughter making signs to her behind the old woman's back, "we needn't make a stranger of Martha. She knows quite as much about Michael's affairs as we do."

"But to think," exclaimed Mrs. Pym, "of your knowing all the time about this here play-acting!"

"And very glad I was to hear of it, too," said Mrs. Strode briskly. "I've got all the British faith in work and I've even hopes of the little devils that have to sweat at the stoking-up of the bonfire down below. It's the little devils that only twiddle their thumbs that I haven't any hopes of."

"I do trust," thought Cecily, "that none of the children will catch mother's way of talking. I certainly heard Janet last night saying:

'Daddy in the pulpit wouldn't say his prayers,
Down came the devil and knocked 'en downstairs.'

She can't have learnt that from anyone but her grandmother—except Louis."

And encompassed as her bairns were by so many moral perils, Cecily sighed, a prunes and prism sigh that came strangely from the bell-like roundness and golden bloom that had all the grace and colour of a shapely muscatel.

"Well," said Mrs. Pym frankly, "'tidn't that I feel any call to worrit about a play-actress and her so far away, too. 'Tis Master Ned that you've got to keep an eye on, for 'tis a queer little pernickety chap, that."

"Michael," said Mrs. Strode, bending down to test the heat of the oven with her hand, "is the last man in the world to have the bringing up of a boy like Ned. You mark my words: we shall not get that fine fellow launched without a flare-up first. He's a naughty jackanapes, is Ned."

"And yet," said Cecily sadly, "all Michael's hopes are built on him. Ned's just the one thing in the world that Michael's got for his very own."

Mrs. Pym fixed her shrewd eyes on Cecily in wonder.

"My word," said the old woman to herself, "'tis wonderful how knowledgeable a cheeld and a man will make a proper simple soul. And uncommon knowing, too, is that Aviolet, for all his book-learning."

"The boy," said Mrs. Strode, "ought to have been told all there was to know years ago. Every minute we put it off is making it worse for him to bear."

"Why ever was it kept from him, then?" asked Cecily crossly.

"And you to ask that," snapped Mrs. Strode, turning on her savagely as she always did on anyone who criticised Michael adversely, "you that are dead sure to go on telling your girls legends about cabbage-beds and babies! Michael was just like everybody except the wisest; he thought that what looked ugly to him would be the same to a child. And all the while, of course, the truth is that the ugliness of a fact isn't in the thing itself but in the mind of the thinker.

And a child's mind is pure. God forgive me for saying so, but you're no better than a fool sometimes."

And sitting down with a cup of tea held under her nose, Mrs. Strode tapped the ground angrily with her foot, while Mrs. Pym chuckled audibly at the tantrums of the "old mistress."

"But," said Martha, unexpectedly philosophical, "'tis just as well sometimes not to put too hard a word upon a thing. Often, when I hear folks going on nowadays calling out 'Murder,' I think upon my old Aunt Susan. Her husband had got asthmatics that bad that you could hear 'en wheeze across two rooms and down a staircase. And one day when they called and asked after her Job, her ups and says: 'Ah, the Lord's been good to Job, that he has. For last night he wheezed and he wheezed and he puffed and he puffed, till I couldn't bear it no more. So down I crooked and off with my garter and hitched 'en round his neck. And then I twitched and I twitched and I twitched and he went off beautiful.' Now," continued Mrs. Pym, "you mid call that murder, if it took you so, but to my mind 'tis a purtier way of putting it to say: 'The Lord hath been good to Job.'"

"Sophistry," sniffed Mrs. Strode, "the boy must be told and at once. And," she continued, when Mrs. Pym had gone, "there are other things that I want to rap out at Michael, things that are more difficult to speak of."

"Don't be rash, mother, whatever you do," cried Cecily in alarm. "You know how easy it is to do more harm than good by speaking."

"Ta! ta! ta! why am I not a hairy eremite in the depths of the Thebaid," lamented Mrs. Strode, "with nobody to speak to but a bird soaring twenty miles up? But, Cis, my heart misgives me sorely," she continued more seriously. "Michael's life has no nature in it. He thinks he hates women, has done so since he lost his wife. Yet it's wearing him, this celibate, lonely, Simeon Stylites sort of a life. He wasn't made for it."

She did not say, though they all knew it, that his private loneliness made the more difference to him because of his manifest unpopularity among men of his own standing. He had stood for the Town Council, had been made a Borough Councillor, as was inevitable in the case of the head

of so great a business as the Phoenix Works, but his standards and aims were so entirely different from those of his colleagues that even while the man's work brought credit to the town, the man himself was regarded on the one hand as a fanatic, on the other as a caustic cynic.

"And he's pinned every hope he has for the future on Ned, who'll go his own way and leave Michael alone in a few years. Just as his mother did before him. And yet, all the time, there's the right woman for him at his very elbow."

"You mean Philippa Halliday, of course," said Cecily. "But you're wrong, mother. She isn't woman enough to satisfy him. For although you may laugh at me for saying so, it's the beauty, the softness, the things unlike a man, that Michael wants in a woman. Philippa is too much on his own level, isn't——"

"Isn't fool enough, isn't cooing, isn't clinging enough," said Mrs. Strode furiously. "You're right, I daresay. For my son, though he's a grim, straight, dogged fellow when he's set his face to do a thing is, in things outside stoves and sons of toil, a veritable idiot. What does he think about his wife? About his own heart? You and I don't know."

"And neither does he."

"You're right, Cis, for you have your moments of intelligence. Yet I tell you, he's hungry for a home, for children, for a woman, though he doesn't know it."

"Cecily," said Mrs. Strode at last, "we're like people under a spell, waiting, waiting for—God knows what. Do you know," she added, glancing round as though the very walls could hear, "that Michael went last year to see his wife act? I was told so by someone who wouldn't have made a mistake. He sat far back in a box."

Mrs. Strode alone could gauge the intense rigidity of her son's nature; never, if he could help it, did he allow anyone who had ever belonged to him in the slightest degree to pass out of his life. "*What I touch, I hold*," said he: his was true bull-dog attitude.

"Oh," she cried, in irrepressible longing, "if only he would break loose and begin again. If he would but divorce her! It's cruel to her, too. It drives her to things unavoidable."

"Could he, mother?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Strode, meaningly.

"He'll never do it," exclaimed Cecily.

"And," said Mrs. Strode despairingly, "Philippa has so hedged herself about with pride, that she'll never *be* a woman to him either. There's a spell on them both, on her the spell of pride, on his of ignorance. Yet she could break down the barriers, if she would."

"Are you sure she cares for him?"

"Cares for him? Hasn't she lived for him, worked for him, thought for him? Again and again, I've seen it; when Michael has been for butting his forehead at a thing and breaking his head over it, it was been Philippa who has held him back."

"But it's her work all that, she believes in it."

"Her work!" exclaimed Mrs. Strode fiercely, "and has your own happiness so blinded you that you don't know a woman when you see one? Why, there's almost milk in her breasts for Michael's children now, and strong men they'd be, not poor little prettylings, like Elise's boy, with his 'Soul Flutterings' in verse. Fancy Michael's son writing 'Soul Flutterings!' Peace! how can there be any peace when Michael's hopes for the future are all bound up in a little trumpery fellow like that, who can't make up his mind whether he wants to be a decadent poet or a painter of eggs on spinach."

"Mother, mother," laughed Cecily, "but he is such a boy."

"Well, you never had a boy so you don't know the make of one when you see him," snapped Mrs. Strode. "Philippa is the way out of all our troubles and I'd rather see her Michael's mistress than his colleague. By all the goddesses of Olympus," cried the old pagan, "why on earth should those two expel nature as they're doing? If I had my way, I'd do as the novelists do, when they've a shying pair, I'd send 'em away together, and make 'em miss the last train. And all that would happen," she complained, rumpling her white hair, "would be that Michael would walk up and down all night and Philippa would sit writing abstracts on co-education—or anything but the only co-operation that Nature cares a brass farthing for—man and woman."

It was late that night when Michael rose at last from the great bureau littered with papers at which he had been working for hours. The long green curtains were drawn right across the windows and the only sound in the room was an occasional fall of a cinder from the fire, or the upleap of a gas-jet in the coal. So it had been all the evening until nearly midnight, for Ned had supped and gone to his room early. With a yawn Michael took the cover off the tobacco-jar on the mantel-piece and began to fill his pipe. His iron-grey head was rather more bowed than of old and the down-dropped muscles of his cheeks were permanent now in their expression of fatigue. That was all the visible change in him, save that the eyes seemed bluer, the smile a rarer illumination. Before he had half filled his pipe, he lifted his head as though listening to a far-away sound; it is a habit common to those who live much alone.

At last, putting down his pipe without lighting it, he turned and went quietly upstairs to Ned's room. There, the blinds were not drawn and through the window came enough light to show the bed. The boy was asleep with his head resting on his arm and the open collar of his night-gear showing the long Shelley-like neck. Michael smiled as he noticed the row of tiny sweat-drops on the sensitive lips and the supple drop of the wrist, a carefully cultivated suppleness, as his father knew, for the lad tried all sorts of tricks with himself, from piano-practice to metaphysics, being vastly interested in everything to do with that amazing creation, Ned Strode.

With the boy's return from school there had begun a conflict between the two wills that was in many ways a recrudescence of the strife between Michael and Elise. But the man had been tenderer far with his son than with his wife, for now he knew something of the wayward nature enshrined in both. Yet what to do with Ned he could not tell, for it seemed impossible to work him into the life of the foundry. The experiment of putting him into the counting-house had only been followed by a hard night's work for Durant and Philippa at setting the lad's books right. Then he had taken to staying in bed in the morning; it had been Elise's way, too, as Michael remembered when he carried up a breakfast tray to his son, only to be greeted by a book

flung pettishly across the room. It was true that Ned had come down to the office later on to apologise, but for all that he remained hopelessly childish.

On the table by the bed lay an open manuscript book; from the wide margins it appeared to be verse. Michael picked the book up and carried it downstairs with him.

"*Soul-Flutterings*, by Edward A. Strode," he read on the title page in Ned's handwriting and with big puffs of fumigating tobacco smoke, Michael read these precious outpourings with a wry smile on his face. The thing set his teeth on edge, although there was not an atom of vice in a line of it, for all the pseudo-Baudelaire attitude, the hybrid Verlaine posturing. In fact, the love-songs, of which there were many, had a lilt and the experiments in metre were not amiss, though to Michael who cared not the paring of his nail for literary craftsmanship these things were mere foolishness. He flung the book savagely down on the top of his own papers and leaning back with his head sunk in his interlocked fingers abandoned himself to a wave of depression.

Suddenly there came a welcome interruption, a rapping at the window that probably announced Aviolet. So it was, as Michael found when he went with alacrity to open the door.

"Saw you were up by the light," explained Louis, "and as I'm late already in getting home, I thought I might as well be later still."

So saying, after leaning his bicycle against the house-wall, he followed his host into the house.

"Look at that," said Michael, contemptuously pointing to *Soul-Flutterings*, after Louis had been supplied with whisky and soda.

"Youth! youth! youth! that's all," said the latter, as he gently turned over the pages which Michael had fluttered so savagely. "And a far better form of the disease than might have been expected," continued he, looking at Michael anxiously.

"I can't imagine a worse one," said Strode curtly, nipping his pipe between his teeth. "It's feeble, it's verbose. There isn't an idea in the whole thing. Wool, that's what it all is."

"In short, you'd rather have the boy a beast than an artist?"

"Faugh! Louis, you know as well as I do—and better—that *Soul-Flutterings* won't make an artist."

"In the long run they do. My dear fellow, it's no use running away from the fact. Your boy isn't a hard-knit business man—and never will be. And you're jaundiced in your prejudice against every form of beauty, every form of art. You've come to something you'll break your teeth upon if you don't look out—in Ned."

"You're a lucky man, Louis, you with your three girls. You enjoy all the pleasure a man feels in his children, without the problem boys bring with them."

"Yet," said Aviolet, "like the discontented fool I am, I often wish I had your luck and a boy. For, after all, in one way, girls are more difficult to manage than boys, if you're one of the parents who worry about the roar of the breakers before they come to them. I don't. I just sit down and love the graceful ways of my lassies. I've often thought that there's nothing in the world as delicately finished as a baby girl's head on pearly shoulders, except an Ode of Horace. But later on, there'll be lovers, or worse still, no lovers. For I couldn't bear to think of a maid of mine withering ungathered. That's the icy hell of Dante for a woman, Michael—the empty amphora waiting for the fulfilment, and sentient, waiting in vain."

"Yet there are women who will tell you that you're all wrong, that they can live as we can."

"And pray, how many men *do* live as you infer? My dear Michael, we English have carried our love of respectability so far that we can now see two distinct standards—the one we talk by and the one we live by. Literature is beginning to break into the conspiracy of silence a bit, but it won't make much difference on this side of the Channel, for people in England always think that books are written by people whose own lives are so irregular that they can't possibly give a fair picture of the average existence."

"So they are," said Michael curtly, "everything in the writer, or the artist, except emotion, is so stunted that he's all out of proportion. Now can you wonder that a father shrinks from letting his son take to such a life? Everybody in this world, except the artist, has to control his emotions to get his work done at all; it's only the unfortunate wretch

of a poet or painter or creative writer of any kind who has to let his emotions loose."

"Well, suppose it is so, everybody offers up some part of himself for the common good. Why, then, shouldn't the artist sacrifice his morals?"

"Faugh! humbug! I say, if we can't have poets without lives that are a scandal, or *La Source* without a maiden tribute, we'll go without poetry and pictures both and be better off without 'em. That sort of thing's the excuse for luxury; it's luxury that is sapping the vitals of every nation in Europe to-day, and always hand in hand with your precious 'literature and art.'"

"My dear Michael, if you don't give a man pleasure of one sort, he'll only seek another. Believe me, it's bestial pleasures against refined ones, or rather perhaps stupid ones against brainy."

"Beast or satyr, you mean, and I prefer the decent beast to the satyr any day."

"There's no such thing as a decent beast in human form, Michael," said Louis quietly. "But you're typically English, for over here we've cultivated our bodies to such a degree that we haven't any souls left to cultivate. We haven't had any sculpture for generations because we won't allow the nude and we're rapidly clothing every other art to go with the draped legs of our drawing-room furniture. Our Moloch is the god Comfort to whom we sacrifice the souls of our children, and you with your co-operative undertakings, your 'equivalent of wealth to the worker' are just making a millennium of contented hogs."

"My dear Louis," said Michael drily, "there are always many thousands tramping the streets for want of work, there is also a fair proportion of deaths from starvation every year, and there will be for many years strikes and riots. If we're breeding hogs, anyway they aren't contented hogs."

"Do you deny that you've given your wealth and your energies to building up a comfortable paradise of fustian clothes and cheese and bread and beer?"

"Not at all. I go further and say that until everybody in the land has a sufficiency of these things nobody's energies ought to be given to anything but supplying them all

round. *When* that's done, then we'll have pictures and books and poems."

"No, you won't, because there'll be nobody to read 'em or look at 'em. Yet you have Guilds and plays acted and libraries for the men—which they don't use."

"That's Philippa Halliday."

"Then let's thank God for Philippa Halliday. You're a mad man, Michael."

"Very likely. I was thinking only the other day that I must be, for I've got nothing in the world for it all but—a son that I can't manage."

"And the satisfaction of seeing your plans carried out. What is it that Vauvenargues said: 'That which makes a fine life is a thought of youth realised in maturer years.'"

"Yes, but I hate compromise and I have to compromise, to bow in the House of Rimmon every day. My men are working under fair conditions, but what about the miners who send me my coal? Think of what it means when a strike holds up my supplies—a strike that never ought to have been. My dream was, as you know, to create an oasis of honesty in the middle of a waste of injustice. It can't be done. I know that now."

"Yes," said Louis dreamily, "no air remains unaltered by distant storms."

"And it's for this," said Michael sadly, "this modified success alone, that I have laid the foundations of my house in my wife and, I suppose, I shall set up the pillars in my only son. For he's going, Louis. I can't keep him. As you know, he's had all I could give him—almost whatever he asked for. But he isn't of my world at all. And he must go."

He sat for awhile shading his eyes with his hand and Aviolet, who loved Michael, could realise better than most men how his proud spirit must have suffered to see his own position so clearly.

"Women," said Michael, at last, "are what the monks said. But they forgot, in their diatribes against them, the worst part—that you can't have a son unless a woman had her part in him. Dragged down everywhere we are by women. As lads, they play with our passions, if they are old-fashioned, to make us weaklings; if they are new-

fashioned, to deny themselves and madden and kill. Later on they pull down our ideals by their incessant self-seeking. The 'fruitful rib' as the old chronicler hath it, is the one hopeless burden of Adam's inheritance."

"You ought to be the last man to say so," said Aviolet angrily; "where would your work be without Philippa Halliday?"

"Yet all the qualities that make Philippa what she is are a man's, not a woman's at all. She's vigilant, far-seeing and honest, I grant, but who in his senses would call those a woman's virtues?"

Louis shrugged his shoulders angrily and murmured under his breath:

"Blind bat!"

Then, looking at Michael's shaggy lion head, he remarked ambiguously:

"Well, you've always been one of those who put your head out of the window to say 'not at home' to happiness when it knocked at the door, and I suppose you always will be. But you'd better let me take Ned up to town with me next week. It'll do you both good to do something new, instead of merely getting on each other's nerves. There's one thing you've got to learn yet, Michael," he went on gently, "and that is to accept the one unalterable reality."

"What's that?"

"Character. Where it comes from, and what it is, nobody knows, but it's adamant. A cross-grained curmudgeon may be perfectly aware that he's raising hell all round him, but he'll go on doing it till the day of his death, and you can't make a race-horse drag a dray."

"I've no intention of doing so," said Michael, rising heavily and stretching himself, "you can take Ned and do what you like with him. He's of your world, not mine."

Michael had evidently grown in wits, if not in sympathy; Aviolet felt, however, a distinct twinge of compunction, for he knew that it was from contact with himself that the boy had learnt to care for books and pictures, had learnt, in a measure, to despise the laborious simplicity of his father's life.

"You can't alter the breed," said Michael as he left, "there's always a predominant strain in every birth, you

know, and in Ned it was evidently his mother's that was strongest. It might not always have been so, had there been other children, but I won't blink facts. And between Ned and me, there's more than the difference between one generation and another."

Very sad at heart Louis returned to Cecily at Upham, for in truth he had given to Ned a closer affection than to his own little girls. That night he surprised his wife by remarking to her suddenly:

"Cis, we haven't iron metal enough, it seems, to compass a boy. And yet after a war we ought to have done it."

Cecily shaded her eyes, as she always did at free talk of the mysteries and went upstairs to weep a little over the deafness of the Providence that had apparently run out of its stock of knave-children, as well as of its store of humour.

Louis gone, Michael returned once more to the intolerable quiet of his house. Taking a candle from the hall stand and a key from a secret drawer of his bureau, he went upstairs again, but this time neither to Ned's room nor to his own. Instead, he stood for a moment outside the closed door that had been Elise's bedroom. At last, with a quick movement of the wrist, he turned the key hastily.

It was several years since he had entered this room, although at stated intervals the old woman who looked after the house would come to him for the key that it might be aired and cleaned. Accordingly there was no melancholy sign of neglect as the lights sprang up under his touch, only a little fading, a little dimness of dust on brightly polished surfaces.

Standing still in the middle of the floor Michael was reconstructing the past with the quick instinct of the heart, more vivid, more clear-cut in its exactitude than any merely mental flight. In the empty grate there leapt for him once more the warm rose-glow of the fire-light in which Elise used to lie waiting for him, with tiny, high-heeled shoes kicked off on the hearth-rug, with the filmy lace-work of a woman's underclothes lying flung across chair and couch, clothes still warm and perfumed with the body they had shrouded. And there, cheek cradled on hand, she had lain, watching for him with bright eyes a-light, or sleeping

quietly so that, as he softly entered the room, the only sound to be heard in it was the rise and fall of her breath.

In his face was a great weariness; yet not for love. He had got past that, for during the long years when no sign came from her, he had passed through the gates that never open for any returning soul, since the one thing for which there is no resurrection is dead love. Yet his face was distorted for a moment as he recalled what this luxurious room had stood for—the softness, the beauty, the colour, that come in most exquisite form from a woman's hands. He was hungry for the loveliness he had divorced from his life, hungrier far than the boy across the landing. For the hunger, as the faith, as the joy, is in proportion to the strength of the man, and Michael was very strong.

For a moment and not in fact for the first time, his mind glanced at Philippa Halliday, glanced and passed her by, for she was only another mind. She had nothing to give of what he wanted to-night. She belonged exclusively to the coarse, fighting, struggling, workaday world he longed to forget.

There lay on the bed, just as Elise had left it in the haste of her packing, a Honiton lace handkerchief. Filmy-light, worked in a design of butterflies, it stood for one of the strongest forces in the world; Michael lifted it gently with his big forefinger.

Then he went heavily downstairs and standing by the embers of the dying fire, poured himself out more whiskey. Having drunk this, he turned a second time to the decanter, and holding it in his hand, stood again as if listening. At last he went over to the fire and pouring the whiskey slowly, drop by drop into it, extinguished the last ember with all that still remained of the spirit.

CHAPTER V

THE DESIRE OF THE HEART

FURTHER down the valley towards the sea there now stood the tall block of communal dwellings that formed the very heart of all Michael's plans. Built in a square that surrounded a central courtyard, in the manner of a glorified "model-dwelling," with long tunnels for entrance and exit running beneath the houses at each corner, they had been faced with white bricks on the inner sides of the square and with red on the outer. The central courtyard was not open to the sky, but roofed in by a specially constructed dome of glass which admitted air without rain, so that women crossing the asphalted floor to go to the nurseries or the office of the House-Steward were under cover all the way. Round the inner side of the block, supported on great iron pillars ran two raised walks by which admission was gained to the two upper tiers of flats from stone staircases set in the turret corners of the block. From the railings which protected these walks there now hung trails of evergreen, for this morning there was to be an informal little ceremony of opening, although the flats into which the buildings were divided had already been occupied for some weeks. The outer windows looked over the surrounding gardens on to the winding river and beyond that, on the one side towards Haldon and on the other, up towards the height on which the town stands.

By building in blocks instead of streets it was calculated that there would be a great saving in land, so giving opportunity for splendid public gardens, as well as for the ring of allotment grounds which could be seen beyond the newly planted avenues and groups of young fruit trees that marked the site of the communal pleasure grounds. All this was Michael's method of giving the worker "the equivalent of wealth." It was the first attempt in England to bring into

the region of accomplished fact Fourier's dream of a phalanstery.

Standing with bare head in the middle of the second raised walk Michael performed the little ceremony of inauguration and wished good luck to this first block of buildings as well as to the second whose walls were already outlined further down the valley again.

At last, as the men raised a cheer, Michael stooped and setting a flaxen-haired child on his shoulder, held it firmly with his right hand. The baby blinked in amazement and puckering up her lips for a wail looked down on the crowd below, while Michael spoke his concluding sentence:

"Here on my shoulder," said he, "is the outward sign of the thing we have been working for ever since we laid the first foundations, not of these buildings only, but of the Phoenix Works themselves. For it is the future for which we have been building all along, the better future which I trust is coming to all the workers on the globe. And no finer symbol of the future could be found than a child."

Whereupon the baby howled and Michael restored it to the mother, while Mrs. Strode whispered to Philippa:

"Yes, he's got the instinct of the orator, but what a satire it all is. Here, right in the midst of homes, he is the only man without one. Do you know what I should like to do?"

"No," said Philippa, but to judge by the twinkle in her eye, it is probable that for once in her life she lied.

"I should like to shake—two people. And where's Ned, this day of all days?" she asked suddenly.

"Gone fishing, I believe," said Philippa drily. "Things go from bad to worse between him and his father."

"And they've got to be worse still before they're better," snapped Mrs. Strode, going off to waylay her son before he vanished into the foundry. Finally she induced him to come with her into the gardens for a moment and there between two red earth-furrows raised for tree-planting, Mrs. Strode told her son what she had discovered of the boy's trouble.

Passing his hand irritably over his forehead, Michael listened, then, cutting her short, he said:

"What is it you want me to do, mother? I thought

you knew I would not have that subject brought up again. It is completely dead."

"Not to the boy. He's only just waking up to it."

"But you say he knows?"

"Oh, I don't know. Not everything. It's all so difficult. Let him go away for a bit, Michael. Louis is quite willing to go with him. No good can possibly come of you two staying tied up together to one stake like a virgin martyr and an angry philosopher. You're so difficult, you know. You look human enough till one gets near and then one sees that, after all, you're nothing but a rock."

Michael smiled grimly, recalling the events of the preceding night. Then he exclaimed hastily, as he turned on his heel:

"Well, well, have it your own way. Ask Louis to take him off to town and play bear-leader to him. If only Aviolet could so introduce him to life that he brings him back a man, the greatest anxiety I have in the world would be lifted off my shoulders."

And with that Mrs. Strode was obliged to be content.

Early that evening Philippa Halliday gave herself an hour's recreation, in honour of the great event of the morning. For it was she, rather than Michael, who had especially identified herself with the home-life of the Works. And now, walking up and down, while the mellow chime of the Cathedral bells pealed from the city slopes, she was rejoicing in the extraordinary progress of Michael's schemes.

Up and down the canal, sedge-grown no longer, plied a regular service of large steamers, carrying iron and coal from the North and bearing down granite and composite granite blocks from the valley of the Teign, and especially, of course, the Strode stoves, gasometers and penny-in-the-slot machines. The interest of the world had shifted now from the Cathedral chimes that spoke only of the past to the clanging iron that was building the state of the future out of the rough hopes of labouring hearts.

It was with something of the rapt devotion of a young monk that Philippa Halliday watched the work which Michael's brain and patience had created. To her, the foundry and the communal life had become a religion and, like all religions, it had its holy of holies, in front of which

the gates were usually closed. In this light, her life looked beautiful; there was in the past of it no folly to expiate and in the future, the irradiation of an ever-widening hope. She thanked the gods for her part in it all. And if there was a secret hunger, too, it only carried out the scheme of monkish life. That hunger also sought its satisfaction in much the same way as did the passionate tenderness of the monk—in the mystery of the altar, the altar of life renewed that is found in a child's body.

And as one watched Philippa lift a tumbling baby one knew with what rapture she approached the sacrament. Every day "Mamma Philippa" appeared at least once in the communal nursery where seated in a circle of tiny arm chairs the small people were lunching. It was often her arms that first received some new life from the midwife's hands. And every morning of late she had come to the rail outside the flat that she now occupied on the second storey of the Familistère to watch the gay procession of school children on their way to lessons, singing the French song she had taught them. It was the rhyme used in the schools of another treasurer of the mystic sanctity of life, the great co-operator Godin, that they sang, the song of the turning-wheel of industry:

"Bon rouet gronde et bourdonne,
Tourne, tourne, va gaiment!
Bon rouet, tourne et nous donne
Mille, mille fils en bourdonnant."

One of the greatest conflicts of Michael's life had been over the establishment of these schools, for he was determined that they should be free both from the mental tyranny of priest-craft and from the degrading conflict of the creeds, over which more energy has been wasted than would have sufficed to solve the social problem long ago, had it been directed towards vital questions instead of tweedledum and tweedledee. Here, in the schools, lay Philippa's special work; they were co-educational and so organised as to offer a training in bodily and manual dexterity as well as in mental activity. The choosing of the teachers was the most difficult task that she and Michael had ever had to perform, for almost all existing training places supply people who have so long juggled with words that they con-

sider a fact an indelicate and barbarous inheritance from savage times.

Pacing to and fro in reverie Philippa was happy, for she was able to say, "Yet still it moves," speaking not of her own fortunes, but of the fortune of the world. It is always particularly delightful to a woman to know that she does a part of the world's work, that a bit of the burden of Atlas is hers, for every step on that road is a step away from the seraglio. It was a joy to Philippa, too, that she had so mastered her blood that she could live without what women craved; she had never lowered her ideal of marriage.

Yet she never wore veils and she had no illusions. She was a woman with much to give of love and above all with a passionate desire to fulfil herself in motherhood. Built for it, made for it, as the mothers of the Familistère often told her, she would live without it and glory in the challenge of brain thrown down to body. Yet, when they laughed at her, these other women, she flushed burning red. To Michael she rejoiced to give everything, except the one thing it is sweet delirium for a woman to give.

She never longed to see him divorce his wife, since that bliss was so dimly descried that she had lost all hope of ever enjoying it in this world. It was a hope to die with, for of all the freethinkers in the communal dwellings it was only Philippa now who could not believe that the abounding life in her nature would ever end. Belief in immortality is an instinct, not a thought, and she never asked herself how without nerves and a body she could enjoy closer communion with Michael than she did at present. She only knew that the old materialism, in which she had once rejoiced, was now impossible to her.

Down at Upham that same evening, Michael sat smoking with Louis Aviolet. Through the half-open door of the room they could see into the hall that, dimly lit by the twilight, took on a vastness, shadow-filled. On the mat at the foot of the stairs lay the borzoi, grey-muzzled now, but with long thin limbs still taut and quivering with life.

"Hist!" whispered Louis, suddenly laying a silencing hand on Michael's arm, "unless I'm mistaken we're going to see the brownies of the house."

From the top of the staircase came the soft pad of bare

feet, the creak of boards and the faint rustle of garments. The dog looked up and by the thump of his tail gave a welcome. Then, sliding gently from step to step, came dimpled, pinky legs with night-dress upheld; at the bottom one foot waved over the borzoi who licked it gently, his long tongue curving round the polished toe-nails. Two smaller figures, rounder and pinkier still, followed behind, each with tread as delicate as though on hare-bells and mountain grass.

"'Exminster rock' in the drawing-room and the Three Graces found a stick a-piece not sufficiently satisfying," whispered Louis, "they signified as much when I interrupted the last pillow fight."

Presently, squealing like mice behind the wainscot, the three tumbled upstairs again, each with a pipe rampant, sticking from round, pouting lips. Then, as Aviolet pursued them upstairs three steps at a time, there were ecstatic shrieks of "Daddy," followed by vigorous thumps from sturdy feet on the flooring over Michael's head.

"You have everything a man can want, Louis," said Michael when Aviolet appeared again. "You'll do the best for my boy, won't you?"

And Louis promised, knowing how sad a contrast his own full life presented to that of this man who filled the hands of others from his own empty ones.

CHAPTER VI

THE WHEEL OF CHANGE

MADAME JEANNE bent forward across the steering-wheel of the car, for the road along the Embankment was clear in front, so that the swift, noiseless Daimler flew like an arrow below the glittering frontage of hotels and houses that look down on the sullen waters of the Thames across which flickered streams of molten light from the streep lamps. Her keen, almost fierce glance was fixed far a-head, through the half darkness that the car cleft asunder, on the great façade of Westminster, the clock-tower pointing its finger upwards into the twinkling of the star-light overhead. Her companion never took his eyes from her face, for, flushed with the speed and the quick exercise of unerring judgment she had been called upon to show during the bird-like wheeling curves described by the car, she looked like a Valkyrie.

"Ah, Raymond," she said, turning to him, while the wind sleeked the long pelt of the fur she was wearing to a white surface like wet otter skin, "for all the blessings of this life we praise thee, O Lord, including speed, and ease, and wealth."

And to the astonishment of the chauffeur in the tonneau she began to chant the song that bears in its rhythm the most splendid expression of the joy of life, the Canticle of Creation:

"O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord: praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

"O ye Stars of Heaven, bless ye the Lord: praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

"O ye Showers and Dew, bless ye the Lord: praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

"O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord: praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

The blood quickened in the veins of the man by her side

till, as Big Ben boomed out the hour with one solemn clang, he cried:

"Jeanne, Jeanne, how good it is to be alive and young and with you."

"Just what I was telling you," she laughed, "though I've been rehearsing all day and playing all night and it's my thirty-seventh birthday. Yet, it moves—the car, the world, your fortunes and my play."

Groping, his hand caught her left one for a moment as he whispered, while they passed the lights of Westminster:

"You must give me a good send-off to-night, Jeanne. For to-morrow I'm off to Middlesborough. Sir John is dead and the writ is out."

"*Le roi est mort. Vive le roi, beau sire,*" she said.

As, a few minutes later, he followed her into the lift that was to convey them to her flat, a queer panic descended on them both. It was the first time he had visited her at an unconventional hour, for he by no means belonged to her Bohemian world.

As they entered the square hall with the fire-light dancing on the old oak settle and chairs, a maid came forward to relieve her mistress of her cloak and hat. The supper table was laid in the dining-room to the right and as Jeanne led the way another woman hurried to lay a second place. There was, to Olivier's fancy, a curious stillness, a strained sense of waiting in the noiseless tread of the maids, in the silence of their mistress, who stood giving delicate touches to the ruddy curls on her forehead in the light that gleamed over her shoulders and arms.

"That will do," said she at last, when the chafing dishes had all been set.

Then, when they were at last alone, she roused herself and pouring champagne into two glasses said:

"Good luck to you for ever and ever, Raymond, the head of the poll—and the woolsack at the end!"

They clinked glasses and in the note of gaiety he forgot his sorry misgivings. Yet all the while, as they ate and drank and chattered, a grey shadow seemed to stand at her elbow.

At last the silence fell again between them, till Olivier getting up with a fine line of thought between his brows

came over to her. Jeanne rose too and growing pale cried:

"No, no, don't say what you may regret."

"Jeanne, look at me," he commanded.

Slowly she raised her eyes to Olivier's and drawing a deep breath, stood with half-parted lips. As she looked she felt something stirring at her heart that she had never known herself to possess before.

"You know," he said, "you must know what I want. I've always wanted it, but—I was proud. I was poor and you rich. Yet soon now, perhaps, I shall have something to offer you."

What a boy he was, as he threw back his head and stammered:

"Jeanne, will you marry me, if I win the election?"

"No, no, never," she cried.

"Yet you do like me, Jeanne," he cried.

Did she? At the moment she was only conscious of a wave of fatigue that seemed to be swamping every sense. And standing watching her Olivier thought what a queer thing he had done. The incongruity of the situation struck him now, though in what precise fact it lay he could not have told. Yet Madame Jeanne seemed to him quite the most desirable woman in the world.

Quite the most desirable: At the word, yet far-off, he could hear the breaking wave of a sea of distrust. Then came a vision of the next week's fierce struggle, of speeches everywhere and the final reading of the lists. Had he ruined his career before it was made for him? A tiny wave broke at his feet; he could hear the hiss of it quite distinctly, for Jeanne's money, useful as it might be, could never counterbalance the loss of social prestige he would sustain by marrying her. Stooping, he flicked the dust from his shoe and as he did so Jeanne caught the impression of his fine figure, its narrow flanks, broad chest and handsome head. She wanted him, but wanted still more the position he could give her.

Yet her life weighed her down, like the ghosts that hung on the skirts of Peter's mother.

"Raymond," she whispered, "you don't know what you are doing. Don't you know that I'm—spoilt? Don't you

know how I have lived? Oh, how could it be otherwise? I had to get on and there was one sure way of doing it. And I was alone, I had put a great sorrow at the back of me. Why should I care what became of me? I was hungry for life, for ambition, for everything, Raymond!"

"I did not—realise," he said slowly. "You were Jeanne, that was enough."

"And you are only a boy—to me, dear. An older man would never have been so mad as to do this. Oh, I know, I know. I'm only one to be played with, to men of the world. You didn't know what you were doing."

But he was beginning to realise. Yet driven half by the passionate beauty of her, half by a pride that was ashamed of the shadow of meanness, he cried:

"Jeanne, forget it. What does it matter? Put it behind us. Say it's never been. Jeanne, I love you."

"And," she said bitterly, slipping the rings up and down her long fingers, "it would be your wife, Raymond, of whom men would say——. Oh, I cannot bear it. You would remember it at every little difficulty between us, at every little flash of anger. It would spoil your life. My dear, my dear, you could never rise above it. You were made for the world. You care for your ambitions more than for me, really. And I'm old, older than you will ever be."

"Wait, wait," he said quickly. And at his words and gesture, she realised that these were common tricks of Michael's. For now, during the incessant rehearsing of *The Corner Stone*, Michael was becoming every day so clear to her that the other men looked like shadows—all save Olivier.

"We can't think quietly to-night. And I have to go away to-morrow. When we meet again, after it's over, we shall know our true thoughts better," said he.

Standing with her hand in his, he bent his lips to her fingers. But as he reached the door, she moved and calling quickly in a low voice, with her clasped hands to her mouth, cried:

"Raymond, I cannot bear it."

But he never heard her, for in a flash of self-knowledge he had recognised the innate baseness of his instinct: it was not the mere fact of her past life, but the world's knowledge

of it that weighed with him. Angry with her for being what she was, and still angrier with her for having spoken, he waited sullenly outside for the lift, keeping his hand on the bell till it appeared. Yet small and pinched as it was when he left her, Jeanne's face haunted him.

In intolerable loneliness she sat on after he had gone, wondering at the impulse that had made her speak so. Her thoughts took instantly that road to the West Country which they knew so well nowadays, for how was it possible that Michael could forgive her, if this man, with all the freshness of her charm upon him, could not?

Once she had met Louis Aviolet at a public dinner and had sent presents to his three little girls, so that probably Michael knew all that Aviolet could tell of her. And only through Michael's knowledge was it possible for her to marry Olivier; through an open settlement in the courts. And that would be ruin for a young man only struggling into favour with an English constituency.

As the wind, howling inland from the North Sea, rattled the panes and blew hail-stones down the chimneys of the flat she lay longing in home-sick faintness for—queerest of all queer things—Michael's advice. For he thought for others always; he was not at all of the world where people could see nothing but their own interests. She even remembered that in a London paper a notice of the opening of the first block of communal dwellings had been included: he was called in the paragraph Strode, the co-operator. Doggedly, steadily, he had gone on with his work and there must often be whole weeks when he never even remembered her existence. Yet every day that *The Corner Stone* was rehearsed, he was growing clearer to her.

CHAPTER VII

THE OPENING OF THE DOOR

THE lights in the auditorium went down till nothing but shadowy bands of luminous duskiness lay across the theatre. From his seat at the back of the box Louis Aviolet could see the outline of Ned's head, dark against the brilliance of the stage as the curtain went up on *The Corner Stone*. Then on both descended the dreamlike sense of sleep-walking, in which everything that happens seems removed to a distance so immense as to be beyond human calculating. For they were looking at the dining-room of the Georgian house at the Phoenix Works and beyond the creaking elm-tree and the tangled garden lay the dim outline of factory roofs and chimneys. The boy never moved nor spoke, only after the first start a curious rigidity held him in a vice and the hand that grasped the velvet edge of the box looked tense and drawn.

With the first words spoken by his mother a shiver ran through the watchers, and Louis saw Ned bend down intently: he seemed listening to accents and words unheard by the other spectators. Slowly, as the story unfolded itself, Aviolet knew that the wonderful acting which had set all artistic London a-cackle was not, strictly speaking, acting at all, but memory drugging. From the eyes of the woman on the stage the present had faded and now, night after night, she was back in the past as it looked to her awakened intelligence. Louis almost forgot the human aspect of the drama in its artistic, its technical interest, so inevitable did she make every tone, every movement, every look in this resuscitated vision of her bygone struggle and refusal. Just before going on the stage she had received a wire from Olivier announcing that he was returned for the borough he had been contesting and that he would be back in town to-morrow, but now at this moment the fact

that she had mastered with her brain was as far off as some trivial event of ten years ago. Madame Jeanne's next play would bring her reputation down, lead-like, for she would never again act in this fashion, since, instead of, as happens with genius, some rift opening in the inner recesses of a soul that has undergone many incarnations, here was a whole chasm open between one stage and another of the same earth-life.

That the boy could fail to recognise his mother, or to understand the private significance of the story they were watching, was beyond belief. And quivering in expectation of some unheard-of calamity, Aviolet waited for the recognition, wondering, too, whether the lad had known all along when he had insisted that morning that the theatre they chose should be *The Coronet*. He heard a quick sigh from the figure in front of the box as the scene changed to the hall at home with the long red-glassed window at the back of the staircase. It was what both had expected to see from the directions on the play-bill, for now they knew that it was indeed the story of Michael's life they were watching, only foreshortened and in vivid crises, instead of spread over the years, as is life's way when it drives the furrows deep.

At last, sudden recognition came, in the turn of a head, the inflection of a laugh, as Elise lifted her hands to her face, till cup-like, they held her chin. The lad rose with a little cry and as he did so the occupants of the opposite box, a stout lady with metallic white hair and deep-rimmed, gouty eyes, and a pale girl, almost an albino, with a swarthy hook-nosed man bending over her, became imprinted so distinctly on Aviolet's mind that afterwards it was all he remembered of the moment, though they had not the remotest connection with the story he was watching.

"Ned," he whispered, "Ned, sit down."

To help the situation he had done the most fatal thing possible, had stepped forward to the boy's side, where standing in front of the box in the shadow across which the footlights threw a reflex wave of illumination, he was visible to Elise by her son's side. Into the heavy gloom she glanced up at the sudden stir; Aviolet's eyes met hers and then Elise's fell, wavered, sank on Ned's.

In the momentary pause there was a curious rustle; it was that of heads turning towards the occupants of the box. Then with a quick jerk the instinct of the stage asserted itself and Elise went back to her business.

"That is my mother," said Ned, as the curtain went down to a roar of applause. "I was not sure till she moved."

He spoke as though she had been absolutely motionless till the last gesture that had revealed her.

"I thought you knew it when you insisted on coming here to-night."

"No," said he, "I only saw that it was a socialistic sort of thing, that was all. And so this is my father's story. Louis, isn't it queer? Isn't it queer?"

They were sitting side by side on the lounge of the foyer and the hand that held Ned's cigarette was shaking visibly. Then, leaning down, he smacked Aviolet's knee.

"Louis, you're a maker of stories. Do you like this one?"

"No, not at all. It turns me up inside."

"So it does me. But I knew she wasn't dead. There were hints, things I heard. How could you all be so blind, Aviolet, as to think other people, outsiders, would be as careful as you all were?"

"And so you learnt in the worst possible way. I feared so. I feared so," said Louis, laying a hand on the boy's arm.

"Yes, the first was from a boy I fought, a boy in the foundry."

Louis knew somehow that Ned had only fought once. He could imagine very well the turmoil of indignation and of slow conviction in his mind at the overwhelming proofs. Again, a phenomenon of every generation, he wondered at the blindness that descends on the elders in their dealings with youth.

"Shall we go back—or not?" asked Louis, as the foyer began to clear for the next act.

"Go? Why I wouldn't miss it for worlds. Nothing would induce me not to see this thing through. Gad! I feel more as if I had written the thing than Balmaine. Louis, how did he know?" he asked suddenly.

Aviolet shook his head, for he knew the rumours of a liaison between Balmaine and the actress for whom he wrote.

At the door of the box an attendant presented a note: "For God's sake, bring him to my flat after the play. I count on you. You must not fail. Louis, for old sake's sake, do this for me. Elise."

He handed it to Ned, who read it quickly and answered curtly:

"Certainly. Say we will come."

Louis understood the tone: the boy condemned his mother, for the first part of the play was undoubtedly "my father's story," written from the side of the dreamer whose unselfish aims were higher than the grasp of those about him. It appeared that the revelation was to bring to Michael's side his son's capacity for hero-worship, for it was the child now that held the scales.

Yet the scales wavered, till the balance changed, for the opening scenes dealt with the father Ned had never known, a young and ardent lover, the conqueror of fate, dragged down by only one circumstance—his wife, but, as the clouds gathered, the man changed, till the touch-stone of it all was reached, the crisis where he had to choose between the sacrifice of his career or of his wife. Putting out a hand, Aviolet felt the boy shaking.

"Ned," said he, "let us go. Better far."

"Damn you, be quiet," answered the boy, shaking off the other's arm angrily. The twitching muscles of his face showed the tension that he had caught from the stage. When the curtain fell for the last time the lights went up on a boy's face that in its sudden ageing looked almost sinister.

"My God, Louis," said he, as they forced their way through the crowd of opera-cloaks to the door, "it can't be true. It's a bit of stage-craft. She hasn't lived like that, not those last scenes?"

Aviolet took his arm, but he shook the hand off.

"And you're like all the rest. Lies, lies, from everybody. I found a picture of my mother once, too."

He had sunk into the inconsequent talk of utter misery, and waiting, Louis walked on, till the flood had subsided.

"Tell me, Louis, the truth. Did my father send her away like that? Did he let her go just for his cursed foundry? Did she, does she, live like that?"

He broke down in a maze of incoherences, while he turned

blindly up a side street, till standing still at last on the curb, he said:

"And so she *is The Corner-Stone* of the arch in his work."

Making a sign to a passing hansom, Louis guided him into it, till at last, when the first rage had subsided, he began to describe his own ideas with respect to the question. Michael, perhaps, had judged rightly, even for his wife's own sake, for though a woman, she was a personality answerable after all to no one but herself. Surely it is better to live out all that is in oneself than to be guarded, not by the strong sword of the spirit, but by mere circumstances alone.

"Well," said Ned at last, "I suppose sons always believe their mothers are immaculate. It's natural to them. One's mother has no lovers—till one finds her out."

Meanwhile Madame Jeanne sat in her dressing-room, with the wire from Olivier opposite her among the make-up boxes in front of her mirror. It meant nothing to her now, for the world was coming to an end to-night and presently the lights would fade and the darkness come in the last stillness of created things.

What a farce it all was, she thought, as she saw her face in the glass; these lovers of hers how ludicrous they were. Her lips appeared to recede from the gums; she moved them slightly and was surprised to find herself still able to do so.

"Madame," cried her dresser, "Madame, let me get you something. Whiskey? Brandy?"

Jeanne turned her eyes towards the keen-faced, dark-eyed woman, with a nose as sharp as a knife-edge. The dresser's face seemed to-night to be the first one that had consciously looked at her, as she held her mistress's hand in her own, chafing it firmly and slowly.

"Did you ever have a child?" whispered Madame Jeanne.

The woman laughed.

"Well," she said, "I've had an accident or two in years gone by."

Then Jeanne regretted her frankness and suddenly drawing her hand away, became mistress once more. When the woman returned she was writing a note at a table she had

cleared by pushing bouquets, cards and letters on to the floor. She was writing to the man who was to have been her host at supper that night and a few minutes later she was driving to her flat, leaning back in the motor watching the shifting of the sky-signs in the moonlit sky.

At the flat there was no light in the hall when she arrived and angry and heart-sick she kept her hand on the bell till a flustered maid answered it, protesting that they had not expected Madame till later. In her drawing-room she switched on all the lights and flung her sealskin coat on the floor. That morning she had read a hideous description of the flaying of a seal alive and, even while she raged at the indiscretion of the writer, she hated the garment.

"Take that thing away," she said, "and never let me see it again. You can do what you like with it, except wear it while you're in my service."

Awe-stricken at her good fortune, the maid carried it away at arm's length, while Elise felt that if she had to wait much longer for her son's arrival she would soon be flinging every piece of furniture out of window and dismissing every servant in the flat. For sheer misery few things equal a ten minutes' wait before such an interview as this. Then the front door rang and she stood, heart-thudding at the sound of footsteps on the parquet of the hall.

He had come alone, it appeared, and standing still just inside the door, he waited, with his eyes on her face. With the sight of his refined features, of his unwavering eyes, she recovered her courage, for he was suffering. Then she crossed the room, while the rustle of her dress shivered up the nerves of his spine.

"Ned," she cried, "do you know me?"

Putting her hands round his face, she drew him towards her. He shivered and she remained, holding him still, but coming no nearer. As she looked with tearless eyes that pricked, she guessed something of what he was feeling. Turning quickly she switched all the lights out and sinking down on a couch pressed her hands over her eyes.

She knew at last that at the back of her mind all these days there had been the desire to go back, to retrieve her steps. Now, she recognised that it was impossible: her child had judged and judged the more hardly because he was on the

threshold of manhood with already a dawning comprehension within him of the tameless force that rises in each generation as terrible in its power as though it had not already devastated our race for countless ages. A girl would not have made her suffer so, for a girl's instincts would not have been awake as this boy's were.

Then she held her breath, for he came across to her and kneeling by her side, sank with his face on her lap. Stooping, she lifted him and pressed her lips to his forehead, and while she rocked him to and fro, she felt the babe she had longed for come back for a moment.

She forgot nothing; all the little incidents of the time before his birth, the revolt against her burden of womanhood and yet the pride of it all. Through the flames of memory she followed her thoughts. The craving for new sensation that had come with every lover; the bored, irritated indifference that had ended each episode. Scene after scene, how similar; the moments of folly, the fading, the anger near to hatred of the parting.

She could not go back to the light, for even there in its bright illumination she would do nothing but read the shadows. Every absence of her son or husband would always seem suspicious, for she knew so much of the underground ways.

"Tell me about your father," she said at last, "is he well? And has he succeeded?"

"Oh, yes," said the boy bitterly, "he has succeeded. He always does in the end. The Works are bigger than they were in your days, much, and they've pretty well doubled their output."

"He's a great man, Ned."

"I don't know. I hate it all. And now it's worse than ever."

"What do you mean?"

He got up.

"Mother," said he angrily, "I'm not a fool. I know well enough that if my father hadn't been what you call a great man, you wouldn't be here now. I shall never forgive him."

"No, no," said Elise. "You mustn't think like that."

"But I do. I'll not go back to the Works, or only to tell him what I think of him. I'll never, never trust him again.

He's hard to his own. He wants us all to be shadows like himself, to care for nothing but a cursed crowd of greedy beasts."

"Ned, wait! Listen! It was not quite as it happens in the play. I took out my money from the foundry, for I would not let it be given over to the men. I was selfish, small-minded. I wanted a luxurious life. I took my own way. Ned, Ned, be just."

"I am, perfectly. I know what he is. You were his wife. He'd sworn to protect you. And for everything that's happened since, he is responsible. He had to choose between his wife and his foundry. And he did choose. So do I, that's all."

"No, no, dear."

"How dared he do it? He was a man of the world. He's made me suffer, too. He's done everything, everything. Nobody else at all. You, you were a woman. Who trusts a woman? They think Philippa Halliday's a splendid creature, but she lied to me, too. God may forgive him, but I never will. And if you talk till Doomsday, you'll make no difference in the way I look at it."

So he stormed, till at last Elise said:

"Ned, you'll stay with me to-night."

"No, thanks."

"Yes, dear, yes. Louis would know I kept you. He would expect it. It will be such joy to me, Ned, dear."

At that he broke down and half-ashamed of his tears lay with his head on his arms across her famous damascened table. Then, leaving him, she went out into the hall.

The maid who answered her call stared at her mistress's face and stared still more as she led the way to the guest-room and herself helped to place her daintiest linen on the bed.

"This is my boy, Marie," she said in explanation. "You didn't think I had a son so old, did you?"

"*Mais oui*," said the girl, thawing from her icy propriety, "it will be a great joy to Madame to have him with her. Me, I remember how mad my mother was when Jean came back from his service."

Then she ran to fill hot-water bottles and stooping, Jeanne piled logs on the fire, longing to put back the clock

so that he might stay with her a few more hours. Yet Marie, when she came back, found her mistress laughing gaily and pouring out the hot water for his bath herself.

"Bless his heart," cried Jeanne, "I could kiss every inch of him." And remembering her own supperless condition, directed that a tray should be carried to the drawing-room.

There they found him asleep and both women bent over him laughing, while Madame Jeanne woke him by pressing her cheek against his. It was, so declared Marie, with the blush of an angel that he awoke.

Later on in the night Elise opened her door and crossing the hall stood listening outside his room. A ray of light lay across the floor and shone on the long whiteness of her robe. Through the window she could see the moon riding high amidst clouds, its aureole a nimbus that stained the pure snow masses to a delicate fairy tinge of ochre. At last, stepping softly, she entered her son's room. The moonlight followed her and lay white on the floor by the open doorway.

In the quiet room, where the breath of the sleeper was the only sound to be heard, there was a great struggle going on, the conflict between selfless sacrifice and desire that craved its satisfaction, and the battle waged in a mind that had never clearly heard the call before.

It was of herself and Raymond Olivier that she thought as she watched the long, slim outline in the bed. For the past, for Michael there was no redress; he must suffer at the boy's hands as he had suffered at his wife's. But Raymond was young with the world before him: this other boy pleaded for him.

Olivier could give her all she wanted: position, prestige, a rehabilitated name. Yet he was young and she old—in memories, if not precisely in years. And marriage with a woman such as Madame Renouf, after a passage through the divorce courts, would hamper his prospects as a rising politician immeasurably. It would be years before he could regain the position he held to-day.

Michael was nothing now, nothing but the merest shadow. She wanted Olivier and all he had to give, wanted him with all the force of her small, passionately self-seeking nature. She had never knowingly refused herself gratification before.

Yet the boy pleaded for that other boy.

Bending down she laid her arms lightly round Ned, not touching, but keeping him lightly within the circle of her body. Old words came, heard on some sleepy afternoon in the buzzing summer silence; 'the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed.'

Curling closer he smiled and the woman who watched called herself outcast and was perhaps so named with truth; yet was she mother, too.

And the tremors of smaller life and higher ceased, as she stooped closer and the moonlight was obscured by a passing cloud. In all the great block of sleeping flats there was no sound but the soft whistle of a boy's breath.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY'S WORK

BETWEEN the half-drawn curtains could be seen the moonlight distilling itself in delicate cobweb folds above the roof of the Temple, as though weaving the mystery of life with the fingers of a god. Muffled by the intervening buildings sounded the shrilling of the Strand, for it was in the dog-eared presence of the law-tomes stacked round the room, an inheritance from a previous tenant of the Chambers, that Jeanne and Raymond Olivier were awaking.

Some one in a distant house began to play the piano; they could hear the passion of a Chopin nocturne, while Olivier performed the purposeless action of squaring the papers on the oak writing table opposite the fire. Outside the circle of light the room was heavily shadowed by the oak-panelling that covered its walls.

"I don't understand," said Olivier stupidly.

"That was my son you saw this afternoon," she repeated. "My son, and my husband is still living."

"He divorced you?"

"No, I am not divorced. That would have to come. But I left him ten years ago and more. He stifled me. He would not let me live as I like."

She was telling the story as baldly as possible, taking an angry pleasure in seeking to extenuate nothing.

"He is Michael Strode, the man who gave evidence the other day before the Royal Commission."

"I've seen him." The truth was driven home much more clearly by the fact that Michael suddenly assumed a bodily shape in Olivier's mind.

"Yes. He preferred co-operation to me. That's why I went."

She shrugged her shoulders and spread her hands fan-wise

with the finger-tips matching delicately. It was a sordid tale and futile with the purposeless folly of the utterly trivial, but behind it there was something. She felt sure of that as her fingers groped for the secret doorway hidden from her sight. She had no fear now of losing her lover; he was only a sham one and she had always been obliged to content herself with shams, having, indeed, never deserved anything else.

"So," she continued in level tones without turning to look at him, "the way to me lies through a public scandal, you see. The way you will never take, my dear Raymond."

"You despise me for it?"

Yet after all, when she heard him confirm what she knew of his nature, there was still a pang for her to suffer, since hope, especially hope of the great things, dies hard.

"No, no," she answered reflectively, daintily tapping the table by her side with one finger-tip after the other. "You are choosing wisely. I'm not worth risking a career for."

It was the truth, yet he was ashamed to hear it put baldly, for where the dictates of every-day duty are apt to be regarded as tradesmen's debts, the payment of which may be put off indefinitely, chivalry counts as a debt of honour. And, without quite knowing why, at that moment he felt his chivalry a grievously offended goddess. Then she showed him the wound.

"But," she said with a wry smile, "it won't be counted to you for righteousness, after all, *mon ami*, for it is not the fact of what I am, but the world's knowledge of it that affects you. Unfortunately, one cannot get rid of a husband as tactfully as one can of a lover."

She was quietly pelting him with soft handfuls that carried no stone, but stuck. He lost his temper.

"I wonder what God made women like you for," he cried.

"To test men like you, I guess," she answered lightly, turning back to get her cloak.

"You can't go like this," he said, stopping her, "I won't have it."

Then, seeing the misery in her eyes, he cried childishly:

"Jeanne, Jeanne, what the devil are we to do?"

He was just as vexed as though a toy had been broken in his hands.

Laying down the cloak again, she smiled and coming up to him, put her hands on his shoulders.

"Raymond," she said, looking in his eyes, "I've always been bad till to-night, and it's a rotten thing to be bad. I've never cared for anything but my own pleasure—never loved anyone but myself all my life—till now."

She could not tell him of the strange things that her boy's helplessness had awakened in her, for the origin of them was beyond her plumbing entirely. She only sank her head slowly so that Raymond might not see her eyes fill with tears, for in her hard life of "pleasure" she had learnt the tradition that it is the height of unwisdom to let a man see one in tears. Even now, in a moment of truth, she was faithful to the precept.

He bent his head, too, to realise the sense of that "till now." It was a movement of tenderness, yet he felt, stronger than ever, the folly of weakness, seeing the disillusioned years of second-best that must inevitably follow the false step of marriage with a discredited woman. And deliberately to acquiesce in tarnish when one could get clearness was impossible to a man of the world. Life is not an affair of high moments, and the true wisdom is so to live that the high moments do not cast their shadows over the level plains of every day. He knew the kind of marriage he ought to make, and this woman was—it came as a warning—a good actress when the springs of feeling in her were touched.

Yet Jeanne possessed the everlasting fascination of infinite mutability; she was sweeter even in tears than in merriment. He drew her closer till, raising her in his arms, he carried her across to a leather-covered chair by the fire.

"Jeanne," he cried, "I can't let you go."

The passion in his tones, the clasp of his arms, made the last turn of the wheel for her. She lay back, white, spent, struggling in the pull of two forces. Then, as his lips sank on hers in an abandonment born of baffled reason, she tasted the incomparable bitter-sweetness of the love that is half-bliss, but all agony for the shame of it. She had never known it before, for it was the fruit of that new consciousness of the inevitable truth—that he thought of her just as the others did, those others who had played with her, given her love's sham, the horrible thing that is tainted with

chaffering, with hate, with all the stale vapidity of the market's lowest traffic. Yet she loved him with a love that was not ashamed of itself even in her child's very presence.

The deep waters closed over her as she saw in quick vision the lives that had called to her for the help that she had always refused. Bitterest of all came the thought that it was she through whom had come her boy's first close contact with evil. It was a bigger illumination than the call of the mind that had been Michael's years ago, for this was of the soul and instinct with suffering as his had not been.

And all the while her lips held those of her lover and her heart beat against his. His call for help was the more immediate and the hardest to give. Slipping from him at last with a quick movement that took him by surprise, she cried:

"No, no, my God, no."

Rigid, motionless, they stood gazing for a moment at each other, till the something in him that was quixotic answered her appeal. She knew, even in the moment of rejection, that it would be a comfort to remember it of him when this pain was over.

"Jeanne, my darling, let it all go. What's career, ambition, success, beside you?"

"No, dear, no. I've spoilt lives enough as it is. I won't spoil yours. And you don't love me. You—want me, that's all. Women like me don't get love."

The next moment he heard the noise of the door closing behind her. After she had gone he stood pressing one heel on the floor, grinding it round and round, as though he would crush something. When, a minute later, he went to the door of the Chambers there was nothing to be seen on the stone stairway outside, with its steps tread-worn by the footsteps of years, but the waving of the flame in the triangular lanthorn at the corner of the landing, nothing to be heard but the flaring of it against the glass.

He felt relieved, but at the centre of his relief was a strange loneliness that ached like a memory of some helpless suffering rising from the mists of the past. Then he was conscious of irritation, of the vague vexation a man feels before that over-high estimate of this world's possibilities which usually arises from a consciousness of one's own inadequacy.

Pulling his papers towards him, he plunged into a brief the contents of which must be mastered before morning. By the time he had finished, the clock had struck three. Then, as he poured out a whiskey and soda, he found that whatever Jeanne had suffered at his hands, she was avenged, for he was racked.

And in the miserable turmoil of mind and senses, he suddenly remembered Strode's face. He had seen it not long ago coming out of a committee room; a fine Saxon head, deep-graven with the lines of conflict.

Outside the Temple Madame Jeanne hesitated for a moment and seeing her stand so, the driver of an empty hansom held up his hand to her. But she shook her head and passed on; she must walk, must find something to look at, or go mad.

Along the Embankment the wind was blowing cold and fresh and at the Temple Steps the water broke against the edge of the stones in little waves. Drawing her cloak round her she hurried on, fearful of pausing, fearful of thought. She scarcely ever walked alone at night and the echo of her footsteps on the stones sent little shivers through her nerves. She even turned once to make sure she was not being followed.

And then she suddenly became aware that in the quietude, with the great hotels above all dark and sleeping, she had never been less alone than now. There were even muttered words to be heard from the sleepers who rested uneasily for the cold that caught exposed corners of huddled limbs. It was the same scene she had once seen gathering crowds at an Academy view, placed as it was there by the irony of the hanging committee, over against the portrait of a beautiful English girl on whom from birth had been lavished everything that wealth can give.

The sleepers on the Embankment; the heads wearily turning for some pillow and finding none, the green, weathered clothes, the hopelessness, the helplessness; these, in the richest, most charitable city in the world, with the wind from the sea ruffling it among the rags of these wretched scarecrows. And there were women there, too, the mothers of sons, old, ruddled harlots knowing the dark by-ways of the hideous city.

Her own troubles, self-made and petty, seemed laughable as she passed group after group sunk down together for a snatch of rest. Her heart opened to the pain of the world, to the women whose work is paid for by a penny fee for an hour's toil and from these down to the soft, furry creatures, bound to the torture-table to bear at man's hands what he thinks is for the good of the world. Suffering everywhere, patient suffering for the most part. And herself, like so many others, callous to it until to-night.

She went home quietly and lay sleepless till morning, beginning to understand, not Michael only, but that call to the world's help which he had heard as a boy down in Upham.

In the morning she was a-foot early, making half aimlessly for Soho where she sometimes looked in at a shop kept by an old Frenchman who seemed to belong to the period of the famous doctor of Beauvais whose memory lingers still in the naming of one of the Soho streets. It was, in fact, in Manette Street that M. Colin lived, of whom Madame Jeanne was in search. He might have a picture to show her, an old book, or a piece of bric-à-brac. Besides, the place reminded her of Olivier, who had first taken her there.

M. Colin was a bit of a scholar and now this morning, as he sat far back in the shop with his old fingers clasping a steaming cup of *café au lait*, he was rejoicing in a wonderful treasure-trove of letters found among his yesterday's purchases at a sale.

"Ha!" cried he, "my old nose hath not yet lost its scent on the trail. An *affaire* between a *grande dame* and the great statesman that no one thought had a heart. I shall cause the ears of all London to tingle with the story—I, Jules Colin."

In the height of his elation he poured out a drink of hot milk for Maître Antoine, the brindled cat that purred at his elbow. Then he pushed back his velvet skull-cap and began to think of publishers. Who would handle it best? Who above all would realise the value of a careful editor? To all posterity he would go down, that editor, as the discoverer of this love-tale of a statesman.

At the end of the long, narrow shop, dim with fog and the dark presence of the books that lined every wall stood

Madame Renouf, smiling at the domestic scene she had come upon, of Maître Antoine and his master. With thousands of apologies M. Colin hurried forward.

"Ha!" cried he, bowing low and rubbing himself over the region of the heart, "Madame has come in good time. I have here the greatest find of the century. Madame, with her great heart, her *esprit*, will appreciate it. I, even I, Jules Colin, who only two nights ago sat in the pit of the *Coronet* wondering at Madame's greatness. It is I and none other who have put my hand on it."

Finally, bustling forward with chair and manuscript, he ensconced Madame Renouf at his table, while Maître Antoine wrapped himself cosily round her great muff.

As they bent together over the letters, they became aware of a small rustling sound at the back of the shop and turning quickly saw a small figure standing there, one not quite in calling trim, however, for nothing but a vest draped its plump body. Under the thatch of hair, big golden-brown freckles dotted the little one's face and the head narrowed to the lovely slimness of a neck that one could span with finger and thumb.

"Oh," cried Jeanne, holding out her arms, "what a lovely baby. Come to me, little one."

And slowly the child advanced between the walls of books, while M. Colin exclaimed angrily:

"It's *petite* Claire. Her father is Lemoine, the painter, but oh! the poverty. They live above me. *C'est affreux! Regardez*, Madame, you will see. The child wants its *petit déjeuner*."

And so it was. For lifted on Madame Jeanne's knees and wrapped in her soft furs, the child drank greedily of the milk and gnawed pistolet with sharp teeth that aroused M. Colin's envy, for he had but three yellow fangs left.

"*Pardon*, Monsieur," they heard a voice saying behind them, "but *petite* Claire ran from my hands. I will take her now, if you please."

It was a young-old woman who stood there, with dark, tragic eyes and a face worn not by years, but by struggle. As she saw the child's mother, Jeanne Renouf had a sudden intuition and rising with the baby in her arms, so that it looked like a fluffy chicken, she said quickly:

"Let me carry her up for you. Nay, let me, Madame. I am half-French, too, and I had a beautiful *bébé* once. Then you can perhaps show me some of your husband's pictures. I have bought many things of this old miser here, M. Colin. Isn't it so?"

And while M. Colin bowed and protested, Madame Renouf had her way and carried the child upstairs. In the doorway of their room, Madame Lemoine paused and said proudly:

"My husband cannot sell his pictures. So for Claire and him I work thus."

On the table stood an ironing-board and goffering-irons and on clothes lines running from wall to wall hung white frills and laces.

"I know, I know," said Jeanne. "But I am worse off still. For I have no one to work for."

"Ah," she cried, "that is Picardy. I was at school there long ago."

It was a picture of silver-birches shadowed on a lake in the tender blue-grey of the Picard sunshine. But Madame Lemoine could not escape from the thought of the washing and while her eyes ran over the luxury of Jeanne's dress, she said:

"He helps me with the washing when I'm overdone. But, thank Heaven, for no money will he paint as—he doesn't see. When I married him I was an artist, too. I made him promise that not even for me would he ever falsify himself; and he never has. And some day they will know what he is. Then they will give great sums for a Lemoine."

"And the child—now? She was hungry this morning."

Then, seeing the flush of conflicting passions on the mother's face, Jeanne cried: "Ah, forgive me, Madame. I did not mean to hurt. I, too, am an artist and I understand."

In front of a shadowy picture of a woman's head bent down to receive a child's kiss she paused a long time.

"Yes," she said, "that is beautiful. He learnt it of you and the *bébé*. You are a happy woman. And the picture is worth enough money to lift you out of poverty for a year. I will buy it, if you will let me. I am Jeanne Renouf, the

actress, and your husband is a great painter. It is but homage on my part."

And so in the grand style Jeanne tried to staunch her own wound by helping, if only with a cheque.

Nor was she content with this, for below stairs was Mr. Colin, sitting ghoul-like over a dead woman's heart. Down went Jeanne to him and clapped a hand over the letters.

"You will not publish these, Monsieur Colin," said she. "You like to look hard outside. You have a passion for irony, but underneath there is no mockery, no hardness. You will not publish these."

"Madame, you cannot mean what you are saying."

"See, Monsieur Colin, it is a woman's heart you have there, a woman's secret. Those words"—he had shown her gloatingly one or two passages—" were written for only one person's eye. They are lovely, tender things. Not for the coarse world."

"It's done every day. It's the chance of a lifetime."

"Yes, it's the chance of your lifetime—to do a great thing, perhaps the greatest you will ever have the chance of doing. She, that *grande dame*, left a little daughter. It is the story of her mother you want to vulgarise. Ah, *monsieur*, think of the secret story of that child's mother being given to the world for every gaping fool to laugh at—an old, old story of a woman's foolish youth."

M. Colin hesitated; he was sentimental and the foolish tears stood in his eyes. But there are more precious things in the world than sentiment. Madame was evidently *exaltée* this morning. These artists are often so. Then Jeanne used another lever.

"You will not publish, Monsieur Colin. You will sell these letters to me and I will give you more for them than any publisher would do."

With violets and furs and a woman's silvery tones pleading with him, a gallant Frenchman is lost. Besides, he was not quite sure that the letters were genuine.

That afternoon Jeanne had two cheques to write, one for Lemoine and one for M. Colin. For a while afterwards she sat dreaming over the fire, thinking of how gaily the last basket of washing would be finished that night. Then taking the yellow letters, Madame Jeanne dropped them one

by one into the fire. For all the bitterness of her own trouble, she felt vaguely comforted, since this was almost the first time she had learnt how sweet a little help given can be to the giver.

But with the comfort she perceived, too, the inward bitterness of it. It was only in petty ways she could be of use now; a little fire and food for a child, a bit of scandal shut from a leering world, a man's career, the thing he valued most, kept safe for him. *The thing he valued most:* the thought stabbed through, and through, and through.

But, after all, although she had refused to bring the help to the world's service that Michael had asked of her, it was not a bad day's work, as days go.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROMISED LAND

MEANWHILE Ned Strode had vanished, at which contretemps his guardian incontinently lost his head and wired in prodigious agitation for Mrs. Strode to come up to town without breathing a word to anyone of what had happened.

She found Louis quarter-decking up and down in a private room, half-beside himself for not having locked the boy in his bedroom when after leaving his mother he had rushed to the hotel and flung his clothes into a portmanteau, giving directions to the porter that they were to be sent to Waterloo.

Mrs. Strode listened to all this, her mouth puckered in an enigmatic smile. Her first words had reference, not to Ned, but to her tea which, as she now observed, she always liked at half-past four to the minute. Louis rang furiously and gave the required order.

"You don't seem to realise the situation," he fumed. "Here's the boy gone, He was under my charge and now I shall have to tell Michael what a mess I've made of things."

"Well," said she comfortably, "if he upbraids you, 'twill only be the pot calling the kettle smutty. And as for the boy, I'm very little concerned about his safety. You see I know where he is."

"You know where he is!"

"Yes. And it isn't the bottom of the Thames, the nearest police court, nor an opium den. But here comes the tea, thank goodness, and I hope it's better than they usually give one in these places."

She poured out a cup for Louis and setting it on the table by him, said soothingly:

"Come, sit down quietly. It's worse than forked lightning playing around knives, to be hunted to death by mad novelists. You've evidently neither eaten nor slept since

this sad event. And yet I could have told you exactly what was going to happen when you took the boy away. He'd be sure to run slick up against his mother. It was like having the appendix removed. Best get it over quickly. And now it's gone and there's an end of it."

"But Ned's gone, too," said poor Louis, swallowing bread and butter and tea as hastily as though he had ten minutes in which to get it down before execution.

"Not very far. He's only with his mother," she said quietly, while Aviolet exclaimed. "The boy, of course, feels like Rhadamanthus holding the scales of justice for these two creatures, the authors of his being. By this time, too, he's probably feeling intensely self-righteous for being in a position to condemn his father."

"His father! I never thought of that."

"No, for you're in a funk and the brain doesn't act then. You say he declares she's a much-wronged woman. What more natural than that he should fly off to her? To show her he's not ashamed in all the boy's high-falutin way. And a good way, too. It'll be a precious bad day when all our bottle babies are cynics. Anyway, I'm going to find out if he's there. What's her address?"

"You're going to see Jeanne Renouf?"

"I'm going to see Elise Strode, my daughter-in-law. And if you like I'll go with a Salvation Army Major on one side and a General on the other, in case my purity should suffer."

"My dear lady," laughed Louis, "I assure you I don't feel like that at all. I only wish I'd thought of so obvious a thing before."

"And," said she, turning upon him at the door, "it's the obvious thing that's just under his nose which the ordinary man never sees and it's the obvious piece of justice, the simple thing that's been crying out to be done for centuries, that he never does. Don't you know why so many boy babies die, while the girl babies live?"

"No," said Louis feebly.

"Because they refuse to use the bottle in the way in which it was intended to be used. The typical man-child would be sure to think it was not intended for suction, but for cleansing purposes, or some other folly."

In Madame Jeanne's large, carefully shaded drawing-room

Mrs. Strode at first imagined herself to be alone, until a slim figure rose from the lounge and turned up the lights that clustered over the mantelpiece.

"Ah," cried Jeanne, coming forward with outstretched hands, "you have come to see me. I have thought of you so often."

With a hand on her visitor's arm she stood looking into Mrs. Strode's eyes. The two pairs were on a level and Elise's strayed away for a moment into the depths of the older woman's gaze and were lost there.

"Elise," cried Mrs. Strode, beginning for the first time to be vaguely alarmed, "is Ned with you?"

"No," said Elise, "he left me two days ago."

"Then I was wrong," said Mrs. Strode, compressing her lips. "He went back to Louis's hotel for his things and then vanished. I felt sure he must be with you."

"No, no," said Elise, "he is not here. He felt so towards me that I could not ask him to stay. He would go back to his father in anger. Perhaps he's with him now. And oh! what will Michael do with him?"

It was a quite different fear that clutched at Mrs. Strode's heart, as she now wondered, as Louis had done, into what outburst of abandonment the boy had thrown himself.

"No," said Elise, reading her fears, "I don't think that. He was enraged, but not mad, not reckless. But I am afraid for him with his father. Won't you write to Michael now and plead for gentle treatment for him?"

She was feverishly turning up the lights and opening blotting pads, till Mrs. Strode caught the infection of her alarm, although she had been proof against Aviolet's.

It was a long letter, but all the while that Mrs. Strode sat over it, Elise remained with her arms outstretched in front of her, the fingers tightly interlocked.

"I've done my best," said Mrs. Strode, when the letter had been sent to the post and the two stood together looking down into the fire.

"Yes," said Elise, "but how terribly we have all blundered. And now the boy appears to be paying everything."

"No," said Mrs. Strode emphatically. "No, we're all paying. Michael's heart is withering up, and you, I think, have paid something."

"Ned came here," said Elise, "after the play had told him everything about me. And he knelt down there by that sofa where I sat. Mother, can you think what I felt?"

Mrs. Strode nodded; she could not trust herself to speak.

"You see he had made a little picture of his mother. And then he found I wasn't like it at all," she continued quietly. "He raved at his father and it was almost worse than if he had raved at me. He didn't seem able to think of me as even my own self. No, I was Michael's. The child had lost something so precious, more precious to him, somehow, than if he had been a girl. It wouldn't have seemed half so bad, if it had been my daughter. Do you understand that?"

Mrs. Strode nodded three times slowly.

"Yes," she answered, "for all that I cut the men up small when I talk, I don't care a brass farthing what a woman may think of me, compared to what a man does."

"He's such a boy still. Do you know what he said: 'Somehow it seems to turn things upside down to think of one's mother having—lovers.'"

"My dear, my dear," cried Mrs. Strode, putting an arm round Elise's shoulder. "Offer up a thanksgiving. Whatever you've done, you've been through Hell once and you won't have to do it again. Nobody's asked to pay a bill twice, or if they are, they can always refuse."

"We're always so ready," said Elise smiling sadly, "to make the laws of the world come right."

"Yes," said Mrs. Strode, "and although we've been studying them for at least three thousand years we haven't added them up yet. I suppose we don't know all the items."

"No, perhaps not. It's so strange to see you and so homely. Tell me about Michael. Is he changed? And Philippa Halliday?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Strode airily, "*they* aren't changed, for they still spend their time trundling the apple-cart of the universe uphill, without ever stopping to take out an apple for themselves. When they come to die, they'll say to Death: 'You don't mean to say you've come for me? Why I've scarcely opened my eyes yet, and here you are telling me to go to bed.'"

Elise laughed softly, not ill-pleased, it seemed, to hear these two laughed at.

"So it's like that with them still, is it, after ten years? And yet, you know, Philippa is worth a thousand of me."

"So she is," said Mrs. Strode briskly. "She always reminds me of one of Balzac's good women—no good at all for want of a little vice, like an English cook's *bouillabaisse*, fish-soup without the garlic."

Elise laughed and then checked herself.

"But how can one still laugh," she cried, "in the midst of all this trouble!"

"I've learnt," rejoined Mrs. Strode, "that this life's a draughty station where one waits an hour or two, before being whirled off to the goal of nothing. And I always warm myself whenever I can—if it's only in the porter's room. But I must go. Louis will be ready for a straight-jacket, if I stay much longer."

"But why didn't he come with you?" asked Elise, her eyes narrowing. "Is he afraid of his wife?"

"No, not at all. When anybody turns Louis into a prig, I'll buy me a Salvation Army bonnet and habitually go out to tea in a woollen crossover. No, my dear, he only thought that two women alone would get nearer things than if he were there. I want to help you, Elise, but I don't know how. For," she put a hand on the other's shoulder, "you have a great deal, wealth, and beauty, and fame."

"All I went away to get, in short," said Elise bitterly.

"Yes, all you went away to get. But I'm always sorriest for the people who get everything they want."

"Are you sorry for me?"

"Very."

"But you oughtn't to be. For I've been bad in the one unforgiveable way for a woman."

"Oh, I'm not sorry because of that. At least, not more so than if it were any other wrong thing. The world's way is to say that one kind of fault matters in a woman, and t'others are nowhere. That's all a lie, you know, a lie invented by men for their own ends. A cold, cruel, mean-spirited back-biter is fifty times more of a despicable worm. And it's a notion that's made us a helpless set of fools, we women, who ought to be up and helping. Instead, we've

been taught to sit mum and act prunes and prisms. Fiddle-de-dee, any slipshod fool is supposed to be a blessing as long as she's 'straight,' though she may be the slackest liar that ever crawled."

"Yet I minded about Ned's knowing. It goes closer than you think."

"So it does," said Mrs. Strode softening, "for we all want to stand well in the eyes of our children. Well, I suppose I haven't glimpsed all the wisdom there is this side of Jordan."

And then the two women clung together for a moment, after which Mrs. Strode went home to write a second letter to Michael, since it occurred to her that the first wanted balance, written as it was on the spur of a sufficiently bad moment.

"The boy jibs, no doubt," she wrote, "at the first touch of the spur, but 'tis no more than the breed in him showing. Treat him gently, Michael, when he comes back to you. For indeed, I think we have blundered terribly, we elders, and as is always the case when there has been a too-delicate screening of the mysteries from young eyes, darkness has been followed by the agony of a flash that sears. Between us we have made him like a cave-dweller; now he has awakened to the truth in the most vivid of all ways, by sight, not hearsay. Yet—no one could foresee from the purchase of a theatre ticket all the unravelling that would follow. I have seen your wife and I sense a certain nobility. I don't believe the boy has been dragged in the mire by such an encounter, rather he is pierced with an arrow, possibly even the arrow of the heroic. Which is a better issue than we could have dared to hope for from our blundering.

"I can even find it in my heart to rejoice that the thing has happened so, for Ned had in him the stuff to make a decadent, taking the titillations of the diseased fancy for the honest prick of passion. Now all his days, unless I mistake much, it is the lavender scent that will draw him, not the patchouli. It will make him a man, but for a time there will be ferment and agony. Again I pray you, treat him gently, Michael."

When she was sealing this, she suddenly recalled the fact that the following day was the occasion when the Works were to be formally given over to the men.

"Louis," she said sharply, turning to Aviolet who was sitting miserably behind her, after having been out to give the boy's description to the police, "to-morrow's the day Michael gives over the Works."

"Then he has indeed laid the foundations in his wife and set up the gates in his only son."

"Don't be a sentimental idiot, but just go down and look out a train for to-night. For I'm going to be there to-morrow, if no one else is. And it's no earthly use our staying here to stare at each other."

In the end they travelled back by the very same train that was taking Mrs. Strode's second letter.

It was a review of labour; under the glass roof of the central courtyard of the communal dwellings were gathered, on inclined platforms that ran upwards like the benches of an operating theatre, all the workers of the foundry; the moulders, tall and gaunt, with bone and muscle leaping to the eye even beneath fustian clothes; the polishers, burly men with the build of the city police, massive and round, attended by impish knaves of apprentice boys, acolytes of the whirling discs; the fitters, quick, nervous, stained, often scarred; the machine tenders, nimble, monkey-like, with bodies that thrilled hour after hour to the incessant vibration of the power-machines they obeyed as cogs and wheels of a system, man-created yet enslaving to its creator.

It was a review of life; for the whole of the ground floor was occupied by women, the wives and daughters of the operatives, many ripe, roguish, bright-eyed, and ready-tongued, but mostly with fibrous, withering necks and tight screwed bunches of iron-grey hair. Over all the faces, save the youngest, was the strained sense of a slip-shod acquiescence not in second-best, but in fifth-best.

Sheath-like the circle of women enclosed the children who sat in small arm chairs brought from the nurseries, the elder ones in white frocks that took every conceivable shade of white, from blue-pallor to sallow corn-colour, with the hair of the elders falling in fluted wavelets that confessed to the tight-twisted pig-tails of the night before. The babies looked up wonderingly at the faces that smiled down on them from the platform towards which they looked, the

faces of the foremen, that kernel or *noyau* of authority on whose shoulders was henceforth to rest a large part of the burden of the common task. Hirsute, pallid faces, these with the skin of the iron-worker from whose pores the dust is never really eradicated.

Over the whole field-ful of folk there passed incessant waves of movement, like the wind-gusts over the bowing heads of a barley field, flutterings, turnings, smiles, laughter, alternating momentarily with a certain stillness when a speaker made an appreciated point. Now and then from the group of women with babies in arms there would come a shrill squall from a bundle that refused to be comforted by patting or swaying. Then, through the wedge of human beings a lane would be formed for the mother to pass out.

As Michael sat facing the long tunnels that led under the dwellings to the gardens surrounding them, he could see glittering in the bright, dancing sunlight the sparkling curve of the river and nearer home, the faint breath of greenness passing like a shadow over the trees of the garden. Against the azure of the cloudless sky an almond tree blushed maid-like in rosy-light with the gracious promise of the coming year. In the dark framework of these passages down which he looked, the beauty of the early spring glowed like a mirage. Overhead the roof glittered like a beacon visible to people with windows looking down on the river from the hillside.

The proceedings began with a festival of childhood, for the secret passion, the bit of idealism, that raised this undertaking of Michael's above the mere deification of the gods of Bread and Cheese, was the cherishing of human life in which lies the treasure of the ages. All through the activities of the Works, like the hope, the hobby, the passion, the chimæra which lingers in every life that is not utterly woe-begone, there ran this golden thread of childward care, more Philippa's work than Michael's, though guarded by him with the bulwark of protection that is the man's work. To Philippa, who stood now on the platform to give the prizes and certificates, each child was a personality; she knew the little lying, or the little generous souls, that dwelt in each, the plain bareness of the homely hard-featured girls, the hardy implacability of small, snub-nosed, freckled boys, the

luxurious desires of baby girls, to whom a bangle on the arm gave a bigger thrill of joy than the naturalist can feel at the sight of an exegesis of the life-history of a diatom.

But the occasion of this ceremony was of more moment than an annual prize-giving: it was to mark a point in the history of the Works, the actual inauguration of the co-partnership scheme and the installation of Michael as managing director where before he had been owner. It was not elation, however, that possessed him as he sat in the midst of his men, for in the long slow battles that know no blare of trumpet, the battles of that ever-rising civilisation whose end, no less than whose beginning, is lost in the darkness, even at a moment of advance it is the sense of what has been lost, rather than of what has been gained, that leaps to the mind. It was also of the dangers of the future rather than of the accomplishment of the past that Michael thought as he watched James Pring, the oldest member of the foundry, rise for the first speech and turned from him to the heavy-jawed, sturdy man who was to speak after him.

Pring was one of the last survivors of the band of idealists who were the hope of the workers' cause when Trade Unions were not, as they are to-day, an international power and perhaps a public menace, but the mere heavings of a down-trodden mass. To Pring, white-haired, but active-minded, with his weighty style of argument, his steady unhasting advance on his meaning, the cause of labour was a religion; he lifted his hat at the name of Robert Owen, "never knew a Trade Unionist who wasn't a gentleman," and spoke of brotherhood with all the reverence a Moslem shows at the reiterated Allah Akbar. On lives like those of John Pring has been built the labour movement of the present day, with its ominous power of paralysing a nation's trade by the upholding of its hand and its exploiting of the chained passions of class-warfare.

The object of his speech was to explain the construction of the society of this co-ordinated foundry, with its division into classes of labourers, according to seniority and service. For Michael recognised the rights of labour to honours and rewards in proportion to talent shown and energy expended. The classification followed at the Phoenix Works was Godin's; there were to be four classes: first, the auxiliaries,

the new hands and casual labourers, merely benefiting by accident insurance. The second-class, the profit-sharers, were to receive one share only in profits, calculated upon the amount of their wages; the third class, the associates, received a share and a half of profits, and the partners proper, a double share.

He concluded his speech by a quotation from Blake, a visionary who, like Jacob Boehme, has a great fascination for the minds of high calibre amongst those unfettered by the gyves of physical science. His old voice rang trumpet-like as he mouthed the syllables from almost toothless jaws:—

> "I will not cease from mental fight,
> Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem,
> In England's green and pleasant land."

He was already over seventy, a man whose vitality of sinew and nerve seemed to defy the ossifying power of age, a man even now with three times the vitality of some emasculate city clerk, or scholar stiffened with long bending over books. Ceasing on a note which all who knew old Pring associated with his spirit, he reiterated Holyoake's words: "Co-operation proposes to make the world fit for a gentleman to live in. It is not so now."

With the next speaker, Bill Radway, the misty clouds of idealism were licked up in a second. Profit, Profit, Profit; his words went to the clicketty-click of the Northern Farmer's horse; interest is the rent of capital, wages are the rent of labour. Profit is made between them and should be shared between them. No simpler gospel, more comprehensible to the bare reason and more painful to the toes of capital, has ever been preached.

Barking roars of applause followed the speaker's points, emphasised with the smart smack of fist on palm. A long roar followed a joke on the folly of imperial talk of an empire on which the sun never sets—"a sun that nevers rises in our court," or on the slag-heaps, and the reeking, poisoned air of industrial towns. A rare fellow, Bill Radway, the emerging type of the masses of to-day, with his burly good-will shot through with a self-complacency born of good, coarse plenty in the way of food and mighty

little background to his thoughts. Whoever else is paralysed by over-much questioning of the brain, Bill Radway will act, for the last thing in the world that he comprehends is that sense of the futility of all action that is sapping the courage of the middle classes.

Watching and brooding, Michael knew the paralysing doubt, for old Pring had no successors among the younger men, since always from the dawn of things the heroism of the world has been kept alive by want and pain, by struggle and suffering. Here in co-operation, as Michael fully believed, was the ultimate solution of the economic problem, for by it the goal aimed at by Fourier was indeed attainable, both his *luxe externe*, or riches and absorption in vocation, and his *luxe interne*, or bodily vigor and satisfaction of the senses. Yet, how was the workman to be saved from that abyss of selfish materialism in which the middle class is losing all its strength, persistency and capacity for manly life? For the brutish contentment of a full belly and an iron muscle present worse possibilities than the prosperity of languid villadom.

What if the way out be a *cul-de-sac*, from which imprisonment men may have to dig themselves with sore labour of pick-axe?

Leaning forward with her hand on the table beside her, Philippa watched intently with her resourceful face, square over the cheek-bones, yet with the chin sculpture of sensibility that befits one who is to hand on the finer treasures of the human inheritance. She was highly civilised, yet power was not lacking there, nor fineness. For the first time in his life Michael felt grateful to her, not for her devoted work, but for herself. She had survived out of the struggle, the, in many ways, strangling struggle between civilisation and vitality. That trained hydra of man's invention, the conscience, without which he would never feel himself warranted in interfering with his neighbour's peccadilloes, had only in his effort at choking her given greater power to her nature. Underneath the steady swing of her daily work, the fires burnt; Michael guessed it at last.

Then he began his speech.

"Nine years ago," he said, "we began sharing profits by means of bonuses paid not in cash, but in credit in the books

and so bearing interest to each bonus holder. There has never, since the first struggle to make the principle understood, been any trouble between us, for I had, as you know now, you who have worked with me so long, no business, no commercial reasons for adopting the co-operative system. We have never enquired whether you belong to a Union, or what political side you followed as individuals. Nor have dividends been made the pretext for lower wages.

"We adopted this plan because it is right. What a man works for should be his and no talk of wages fund, or of supply and demand, can be allowed, in that future which is already at the doors, to interfere with this principle of justice. It matters not by what system of law or force the clever man absorbs the results of other men's efforts, however it is done, it is oppression and wrong. It is not benevolence, but justice that the man asks, who lives by the works of his hands. His product is not, has never been, measured by the wages which he gets. There is another equity besides that of a contract made under the stress of necessity. Of all the crimes under the sun, crimes selfish, crimes bestial, crimes petty, crimes cruel, there is none equal to the crime of a man who reaps a lordly income from the midnight stitching of sad-faced women or from the worn-down labour of hopeless men. The dense fog of money-making that still creeps miasma-like, over our land, is breaking, here and there, into the faint silvery twilight of the truth. We are beginning to realise that the mark of Cain is really branded on the man who proudly declares he is not his brother's keeper."

The very cheers by which his words were greeted had to his mind the sound of a farewell, for all that was left now to him was the guiding, restraining energy of a leader who looks forward in everything he does to the time when his effort shall be no more needed.

Standing unseen in a dark corner at the back of the hall, Mrs. Strode and Louis Aviolet listened to the concluding words of Michael's speech.

"Has he had my letter about Ned, do you think?" whispered she. "But he must have."

"Yes," answered Louis, "and I think he shows it. He always awaits a blow very passively, only with an extra

rigidity about him that seems to make even his limbs move more slowly."

"What do you make of all this?" she asked, nodding with her eyebrows raised towards the men who were receiving share certificates. "For all my talk, I've never really understood it."

"Just a correction of human perspective, I fancy," answered he, "for selfishness is only an error in perspective, after all."

"Yes," snapped Mrs. Strode, "but there *are* only two motives in people's actions—hunger and love."

"Just so. But remember everything depends on the kind of hunger or love. You don't belittle any act by putting it down to a motive like that, though you may fancy you do. And a one-ideaed man is the greatest force in the world."

"So it seems," said Mrs. Strode, "but, oh, I wish the next hour were over. Bah! how smugly self-satisfied they are."

It appeared that she was referring to the "sons of toil."

CHAPTER X

THE LONELY FURROW

"You've had my letters and you know what has happened?" asked Mrs. Strode.

Michael's office, in which they were all assembled, presented to Aviolet's fancy the appearance of a police court with Michael as judge and Mrs. Strode and himself as prisoners at the Bar, while Philippa Halliday, restlessly fingering the papers on her desk, might have been taken for the jury.

"Yes," said Michael, turning towards his mother as she stood tapping her foot on the fender, "I understand that he takes his mother's side against me. It is natural enough. The boy was unhappy with me."

"And I," said Aviolet, "have played the part of Jester—a sorry enough Jester, too."

"Don't blame yourself, Louis," said Michael. "All this had to come. And it's no one's fault but mine."

He had none of the small man's reluctance to acknowledge himself in the wrong. Yet he was harder hit than he was going to allow the others to guess, for it was a fundamental craving of his nature, that desire for continuance of life which finds one outlet in the love of offspring. His child and his foundry were to him the most precious emblems of himself, the pictures that the savage scratches on the rock.

"I've done everything possible," said Louis. "I've been to a private enquiry office and no doubt we shall hear from them shortly."

Michael frowned, for he had the idealist's hatred both of liars and liar catchers.

"After all," interposed Philippa, "he has only been missing three days at most, and he is quite likely to appear at any moment."

But the feeling in the room was against her; every one

concerned made her quickly realise that she had expressed the wrong sentiment. She sat on, however, a trifle angry with herself for venturing to perceive the want of humour which the Strode family were betraying. Yet it was not long before Mrs. Strode's common sense inclined her to the same view.

"The truth is," said she, "we've got jumps over the general situation." By that elegant periphrasis she meant Elise; "and are making a mountain out of a mole-hill. We've none of us grasped our nettle and now we're yelling at being stung."

"I shall try to grasp my nettle when the boy does come back," said Michael.

"Not in anger," exclaimed Mrs. Strode, "for it's a clear case of the fathers feeding on sour grapes."

"You seem quite convinced that I cannot control myself," he retorted.

"No one acts the more wisely for feeling that there's a bad mistake at the back of him for which he is responsible."

"So that's what you feel."

"I always have. We always have."

"The Family Council, you mean," said Michael, glancing grimly round him at the spectators, who felt themselves rather absurdly banded together in a kind of curtain scene.

The next moment they heard light, hurried footsteps; Philippa went quickly to the door and opened it.

There stood Ned.

"No," cried Michael, as the others prepared to leave. "Don't go. I want you to stay."

It was obvious that the lad was labouring under great excitement, for they could see the quick panting breath that came and went. Then, as he looked up at his father, a thrill of animosity flashed across his face, for Michael seemed to him a colossus of will and size. He rebelled at this strength and silence; he longed to go up and strike the face that seemed like a stone image convincing his mother and himself of butterfly lightness.

Mrs. Strode was afraid and moved forward hastily, but Louis caught her elbow.

"No, no," he said, "Michael remembers."

For, as he watched the father's face, Aviolet had read

there the writing that the past had traced on it, the patient forbearance with what was so unlike himself.

"I heard what you were saying to the men," cried Ned. "But you didn't think like that about my mother. You never felt yourself *her* keeper. You didn't care what you sent her to."

He was lashing himself into a fury.

"She went of her own free will, Ned. She chose to go."

"Only after you had made her life miserable. You care for nothing but your own ambitions."

"Ned," said Michael quietly, "you must remember what a young man often forgets—that a woman, even if she is a wife, is responsible for her own life. Your mother was a free agent, though she was married to me, and she elected to leave me. She knew from the first what I was pledged to, what sort of a life she would have to lead if she married me. But she found it unbearable. How could I force her to stay? Certainly I might have been kinder, wiser, gentler, many things I was not. But when I found she considered herself in a prison, I was glad for her to go. As any man would have been."

"You don't blame yourself then, really? You don't feel that you balanced her and *that*," he pointed to the foundry, "and flung her away?"

"I did," said Michael curtly, "and if I were to have to choose to-morrow, I should do the same thing again."

Ned drew a long breath. After a second, with tightening lips, he retorted as he turned on his heel:

"Then there's nothing more to be said."

"Yes, there is," said Michael. "I want to know what you're going to do. Don't wreck your future by folly that can do no good to anyone."

Raising his eyes to his father's face, Ned began to realise dimly the cunning warp in which the loom of life binds us to one another in bonds that test and strain the material of which we are made. It is the passing of youth, such realisation as that. At length in the boy's ears all the sounds outside the room seemed to pass to a far distance. His face worked and his lips twitched, till to hide it, he put up his hand.

"Michael!" cried Mrs. Strode, furious with her son for

his calmness in face of the boy's misery. It struck her again that Michael was not so much a temperament as a stored-up force.

"Wait, mother," said Michael under his breath.

"Why was I told lies about it if you weren't ashamed of it?" exclaimed Ned.

"You were not old enough to understand. In such a case it is natural for a father to wish to avoid throwing a shadow over his son's boyhood."

The boy softened; he was not ungenerous and his father's tone cut to the quick.

"Father, can't you understand how I feel about it?"

"Only too well. I have always dreaded this moment. For it was inevitable in such a case that a child should range himself on one side or the other. You see, Ned," he went on slowly, "unless you have lived a great deal and experienced much, you can't understand anyone in the least different from yourself. I have done wrong in not showing you clearly how I look at things. Only I imagined that if you were brought up in the midst of my work, it would come natural to you to understand me. I was mistaken, it seems."

Ned hesitated, feeling himself wandering in a maze of vague doubts, doubts of his own wisdom, of his own purposes.

"I think," continued Michael, "that the best thing we can do for you will be for you to make the grand tour, to travel a bit and see the world. I don't want anyone to go with you. It shall be a pilgrimage into the wilderness, a pilgrimage in which you will see everything with your own eyes. But before you set out, I want you to take a little walk with me through the foundry that you hate so."

He smiled sadly and putting his hand under the lad's arm, prepared to carry him off. Louis Aviolet followed, very much like a tail-piped dog, to Mrs. Strode's fancy.

"Well," said she to Philippa, when the men had gone, "so that's the way a man thinks a difficulty can be patched up."

"But what else is there to be done?" asked Philippa, coming forward with a face frowning in perplexity. "It's no solution, of course, but it may make Ned more contented."

"Make Ned more contented, forsooth! The jackanapes, to sit in judgment like that. A flea discussing the quality

of the blood he has just tapped in the vein of a Newton! Pretty times we are coming to, when Master Ned is the arbiter of the fate of nations."

"Scarcely all that," smiled Philippa.

But Mrs. Strode was not to be turned from her purpose this time.

"Philippa," said she, "were you born in a refrigerator? I tell you Michael's shutting up like a clam to everything that's warm and homely and human and you stand and look on."

Philippa had turned very white, but she neither moved nor spoke.

"I'll not hold my tongue any longer. I say you haven't any blood in your veins. Oh, Philippa, he's lonely and hungry. Can't you see it? He's pinning every hope he has on the boy, who isn't worth it. Can't you see it?"

"Of course I do. But as long as there's the faintest thread of his wife left in his life, there's no room for me. Ned isn't only the future, he's the past as well. To Michael, Ned stands for his mother and there isn't any room for any one but her—even now."

It was her real thought leaping to the surface at last; jealousy at bottom, but a sensitive, far-reaching jealousy that was nearly all pride.

"So," said Mrs. Strode, "that's it, is it? Well, all I can say is, that if every man in the world has to deal with such fantastic, obstinate jades as Michael has, I don't wonder that most of them think of women as a little higher than the brute and a little lower than the human."

Hurrying on her furs as though bent on strangling herself, she made for the door. There, turning round suddenly, she said:

"Then the best thing that could happen would be for Ned to go to Heaven. For it strikes me he's precious little use here. And I suppose Elise ought to be the next victim. Nothing short of a holocaust of all Michael's relations will satisfy you, I see, Philippa Halliday. You want to make your way to your marriage bed over human bones."

At that, seeing Philippa's sad face, she cried:

"There, forgive me, my tongue's all springs. But you will wear that beautiful grey dress I had made for you, won't

you? Wear it of an evening when Michael comes over to the Familistère about the last mail," she coaxed.

"Perhaps," said Philippa, with a smile at the corners of her lips.

"Ah," said she, "if he could only see you look like that. But it's my belief you never do see each other at all, either one of you."

As she went home, worn out with emotions and travel, she remarked to herself:

"Still I like Elise best. But Philippa was made for him. And I always did want to give a man what suits him. He gets so teasy else."

Meanwhile, from the smut-covered gallery where he had watched his first casting, Michael told Ned of what his dreams had been, of how amid the roar and the fumes he had conceived the task of his life.

He knew now that he had been driven by nothing but the spirit of his time. For, speaking from the standpoint of economics, it is the century that is just over that was the age of blank Voltairean negation, a period that leaves us now with the work of reconstructing a new social order on our hands, out of the débris brought down by the axes of Lassalle, Marx and their followers. It is to men of Michael's calibre, men of affairs, not of original thought, that the work of rebuilding must be entrusted. To Strode the world was no laboratory, no study, but a workshop.

Just now he stood at the point that may be called the second climacteric of a man's life, the moment of the first recoil in the face of success, when the original energy that grappled with adversity is exhausted and the power needed for the second flight is not yet gained. For every success is a partial failure, and no one knows this better than the great conquerors. So clearly did Michael realise it that he often wondered whether his men were really better for his work, whether the game of the foundry was worth the burnt candle of Elise's purity. For no man in these days, when the woman is only just beginning to emerge, is ever really sure whether woman is a climbing plant, dependent on man for her upholding, or a stemmed growth strong to the buffeting of the winds of heaven.

These doubts made him tender to the boy; he recognised

that Ned felt himself robbed through his father's quixotry of friends of his own standing and of a career suited to his tastes. The boy's fate was illumined by the sadness of the mother's, as Michael began to realise that the self-contained life of a communal settlement is cramping to young brains.

In the boy's discontent the father could perceive a micro-cosmic picture of the weakness of his ideal of a self-contained Utopia in an unideal world. There was the bustle and stir of life about his foundry now, but deprived of the vitality of Philippa and himself, it would run the risk of sinking into the sluggish flow of a backwater. Compact schemes, in four square walls, such as suited Michael's instinct for perfection, are impossible to minds that crave the windy ways, the open roads, the winding by-paths of the actual. Anyhow, it was evident that Ned must go.

Thus ended the festival of childhood for Michael, since the small-minded deities of irony were in a mocking humour.

A few days later Ned went down to Upham to say good-bye before setting out on the voyage that was to wipe away the memory of his trouble. Ultimately he was to go to Paris for a course of study at the Sorbonne, but in the meanwhile the most pressing care was the housing of his great Dane. Of all his friends it appeared that Mrs. Pym was the one on whose ideas of food, exercise and discipline he could most surely rely. But the good lady, being of the persuasion that the more languages a man hath, the more leaks hath his learning sprung, took but a gloomy view of Ned's prospects.

"Whatever do 'ee want to go foreign for," she exclaimed, "'twill but curdle your inside with the messes you'll have to eat and they not able so much as to put their mouth to a decent word! 'Tis same as if you was ill-wished. It sims as if you hadn't been born right," said she, eyeing him up and down, as they sat by the fire watching the blue-grey cloud masses that scudded before the south-west wind.

"Perhaps I wasn't," said Ned humbly, "but you will see to Dane, won't you?"

"A great baggering beast that'll eat a leg o' mutton a day," she said, contemplating the animated rock of a dog that had taken possession of her rug. "And now," she grumbled on, "I suppose I shall never be able to get near

my own fireside again. But there, my dear, don't you fret, I'll look after 'en proper. Though why 'twas written down above that two dogs no smaller than ponies should come down upon Upham, the Lord in his goodness only knows. But that Roosian of Mr. Aviolet's shan't rip the sides o' thy Dane, not if I've got to brain 'en with a poker. And so you'll be going up to London first, I suppose. This comes from there," she said, ducking her head to show the fuzzy white *toupet* that now covered the bareness of her forehead.

"What d'ee think of it, my dear?" she asked anxiously. "'Tis a thought young, I fancy, and first-long I couldn't bring myself to put 'en on. But I hear 'tis quite the thing to wear one. And my cousin Sarah ought to know, for her's in the trade and got married, too, just when there wasn't any hopes of such a thing."

"How was that?" asked Ned.

"Well, 'twas like this here. Sarah had been maid to a fine lady who left her a pension—and last year the pension stopped, for the lady died. That brought Sarah to her beam-ends, till there come along one day a funny little man that used to do the lady's hair back along. He found Sarah crying 'pon a seat in the Park. Saith he, when he heard the troubles: 'There is no call for tears.'

"He was a Frenchie and talked up that old stuff. Sarah wrote it down, being dotty with her first love at past sixty.

"'Madame,' saith he, 'is an artist, a greater artist far than me in the hair. I have seen the head-dresses she hath made.' And with that he carried off Sarah to his garret and there her saw wigs and wigs and wigs. For he jobbed for a big shop. And he took her on as an assistant in his trade, till it got about that her worked better'n he. So he said 'twasn't the thing for her to work with'n any more, her being a single woman and thereupon he turned her out."

"And did she go?" asked the boy.

"Ay, and he pretty near starved, for her got nearly all his work at the shop, being such a fine workwoman. Till one evening her thought o' going up to pass the time o' day with 'en. And there he was, hungry, starving, cold and dark.

"'I'll come back and work with you again,' saith she, 'for 'twas your kindness that saved me.'

"'No,' saith he, ''tisn't fitting for a man and maid to work along together under one roof.'

"And they old bones enough, one would ha' thought. But Sarah up and says:

"''Tis not impossible. There are ways of making one roof for man and maid quite proper.'

"'As how?' saith he.

"'Ask the parson,' saith she, blushing.

"And he blushed too. 'Wouldst thou, dear one?' saith he. 'But no, I am a starveling.'

"'Ah,' cried she, 'you are the one man for me,' which was true, seeing that nobody else had ever asked her.

"But it took his fancy uncommon and so they got made into one, she and her Frenchie. And there come this here bit of hair from 'em, in answer to the wedding present I sent of a couple of fowls and a ham."

Mrs. Pym was quite cheerful with the prospect of hearing from Ned of her cousin's style of housekeeping, for before he left she extracted a promise that he would look them up somewhere out Peckham way.

From Mrs. Pym, Ned went on to the Aviolets', where he found Louis in a philosophical humour and a velveteen coat.

"Don't be downcast, old boy," said he, "for nobody need despair of overcoming anything. We've all of us come up from such depths below that the heights above are nothing. With the journey up from the primitive ocean behind us, what's still left for us to get over is but a summer day's journey."

And Ned nodded, knowing that Louis was thinking of Madame Renouf.

Shading their eyes from the level sunrays, Mrs. Strode, Cecily and Louis stood in the doorway to watch the youthful figure that strode away so jauntily because he knew he was being watched.

"The lad," said Aviolet, "has licked the gilt of romance off the gingerbread of sensuality. He'll come to no harm from it. It's better so."

"Not if he likes gingerbread," said Mrs. Strode curtly.

"That," answered Aviolet laughing, "is one of the remarks that could only come from a woman, for it's thoroughly sceptical of the wisdom of man. And," said he, creasing

his nose in his peculiar one-sided smile, "let me tell you that I'm a Frenchman living up to his idealism and that's the finest product of the earth. The morality of the Teuton is based on utility, but the Latin is *the* idealist of the world."

"That's why all the Southern people are so immoral, I suppose," said Cecily, "and, oh, Louis, the boy is going to live among them. I wish you wouldn't tease me with Teutons and Latins when all I want is to have a good cry."

"Then come and do it," said he, opening his arms, "it'll give me a cold, but that's always the worst of keeping a subject race, like women, about. They're always so bad for their tyrants. We've conquered everything that the old myths spoke of the gods as mastering—everything but woman. She still hurls thunderbolts. Icarus riding on a monoplane has no need to bother about the melting of his forefather's ligaments, but he still has to cope with *femina furens* and *femina mendax*."

Ned was to begin by a walking tour and on the first day's tramp his father accompanied him. Side by side the two footed it, coming by the mere swing of heel and toe into a *rapprochement* of the blood, till at length they had gained the summit of a hill from which they could look down on Exminster and the sea, lying like a ring of pearl against the horizon.

From thence they turned aside into a wooded valley through which the river winds, tree sheltered. Here the footsteps of the spring were visible in copses where the starry undergrowth of anemones peeped through the dry branches of the past autumn. High overhead they could hear the wind in the tree-tops, an audible token of the life springing in all nature's body, from the sap in the trees to the new brightness in the sky. In the enchanted sleep of this stillness, where life was active under all the quietude, new perceptions were arising in the hearts of both. For the heart of man has its seasons and Michael, as well as Ned, obeyed the up, up, of the recurrent life that fashions the garment of God.

Coming at length to a rock overhanging the valley, they sat down together on its whortle-hung, mossy roughness. Far below, crawling like sea-spume over the rocks, sounded the roar of the river and overhead a tiny moon crescent

poised its sickle in the sky. Lying there side by side, with the moorscents rising round them like incense, father and son felt the walls go down between them, in that kinship of the blood which over-rides all fury born of frustration, ignorance and ugliness. They had gone back to the primal cleansing of the heart of nature, as only town-dwellers out of their exile can do. As the sickly horror of the footlights faded from Ned's mind in the changing beauty of the still sky, he could think sanely of his mother. The madness gone, he turned and laid a hand on his father's knee.

Michael understood and, as the valley crags grew darker, he took the boy into the inner shrine of his mind that not even Philippa had entered as yet. For, monk-like, even now to Michael the woman was the strange unknown and the difference of flesh had, for him, its reflex in the strangely differing mind. It was in part a product of the suffering Elise had brought him, the revolt of the senses from all imagination of her.

But now he talked on and on, pushing open door after door while the boy followed, treading softly for the fineness of the place wherein he stood. His father's was the view of life that is probably becoming the dawning creed of to-day, taking the place of the mean system of rewards and punishments to which the race has so long been enslaved. For out of the blood-stained conflicts of the past and out of the nerve-shattering conflicts of the mind into which these battles of long ago have sunk, Michael saw emerging, like a figure from half-hewn marble, the divine goodness that, inherent in beast and bestial man, has to force its way up through æons and æons of battle into the light of day.

"In one sense," said he, "there is no God, only the God whom we evolve, you and I and all men by our struggles. And to the fight I see no end. So, down in Exminster, I pick, pick, pick like a navvy at the false foundations of our society, trying to build a better, though I never know whether the whole structure may not collapse and bury me in its ruins. I can see nothing but foundations now, boy," he added sadly, "but you want to work at the superstructure and I'll not prevent you, though I've been a selfish father, trying to keep the umbilical cord uncut longer than was good for you."

Then he spoke of the two passions of his mind that had driven hearth pleasures from his fancy, of his love for the iron veins of the earth and of his longing to create one beginning of the more perfect social order for the swarms of disinherited.

"I want to forget them all," exclaimed Ned, "I should like to have been born when people don't even seem to have seen them."

"So did I want to forget them, I believe," rejoined Michael, "and paradoxical as it sounds, that's what all who work for them want to do—to forget them. For it's only when you're easing up things a bit for the few that you can quiet the trouble of the many in your mind. That's the only real comfort you can get, you know, when these things have grasped hold of you."

There and then, smitten with a shame of himself, the boy offered to go on a journey to the North of France that he knew his father had planned for him. It was to inspect the working of the famous Familistère of Guise and to make notes on the conditions of labour in French iron foundries. Before they parted it was settled that Ned should leave for Guise as soon as he tired of his walking tour.

They heard at that moment, swirling in a wide circle high up in the air, the ringing hum of a great bell booming in exquisite loneliness through the stillness of the valley; it was a night-jar winging its way homewards and in the solitary rhythm of its note sounded all the hunger of the world, from the mere desire to fill a starving mouth that has altered the face of the globe and built cities where the sedges once rustled, up to that noble craving of the soul for knowledge and light that drives the thinker on his lonely path as pioneer to the following masses of humanity.

With a wrench of the hands they parted, Michael for Exminster, Ned for a supper of bacon and eggs at the nearest farm. From woodland and valley they had learnt the kinship of things, of the sap in the trees, the boom of the night-jar and the dusty strife of city life; all tending to an unseen goal by steps the worker cannot see.

CHAPTER XI

THE CUTTING OF THE KNOT

BUT Ned's pilgrimage was not to be entirely alone after all, for at the end of October, after he had been abroad nearly six months, he was joined by Louis Aviolet, who appeared, knapsack on shoulder, with rather half-hearted instructions from Cecily to procure for her one of those wonderful French *bonnes* of whom she had heard so much.

"My dear," sniffed Mrs. Strode when she heard of the project, "how do you imagine Louis is going to convoy the creature here? Besides, it would not be *convenable*, even if he finds one. And Louis is sure to think more of her looks than her cooking, for he always liked a quaint gargoyle for a maid."

"I'm tired of English cooking," persisted Cecily, and Louis remembered her words when, in the vortex of religious excitement at Guise, he came upon a desperate woman.

It was late in the evening when Louis and Ned reached this ancient, stony town of the Nord, but as the hotel diligence rattled over the cobbles of the square in the midst of which dances the flamboyant statue of Camille Desmoulins, they found the whole town gathered there, shouting, gesticulating and snapping fingers at their neighbours' noses. Slipping into the midst of the crowd they discovered that on the preceding day the nuns of a neighbouring convent had been ejected from their home and that to-day they had made their first appearance in the lay dress which had been provided for them at the house of a rich woman of the old faith. It was true that most of the sisters had now departed on their way by the afternoon train, but the passions of Guise had been necessarily fired by the passing of the old order.

Meanwhile M. l'Abbé took snuff and waited for the excitement to subside, while Sœur Agathe, the humblest member of the sisterhood, took shelter up at *La Couronne* where her Cousine Berthe was hostess and where, so chance willed it, the time and the hour had brought the man of Sœur Agathe's destiny, in the person of the Monsieur who spoke such good French, though he demanded a tub after the English fashion.

The instrument of the fate that threw Sœur Agathe into Aviolet's arms was none other than Benedict whom two mornings ago the Mother Superior of the convent had sentenced to immediate execution.

"But, Reverend Mother, behold his fatness, the gloss, the silkiness of his incomparable fur. And Cousine Berthe at *La Couronne* hath not a bad heart. She will surely take him in—when she takes me."

These were the most fatal words that Sœur Agathe could have spoken. For they reminded the Mother Superior of the day, very near now, when the rough hand of La République would drive her and her nuns from the shelter of these old walls. She was ready, however, for the event, and the future home of every sister was arranged. There remained but Benedict's fate to settle: that was the last piece of authority left to the old aristocrat.

But Benedict was no martyr sentenced by the fury of a Roman Pro-Consul, and for him a bucket would be enough, seeing that he was but the convent cat—and all that Sœur Agathe had for her very own in the world. Now he slept almost his last sleep in the window of the refectory; he, the jewel, of Benedictine colours—whiskers, paws, and shirt-front white, and his big body jet-black. Sœur Agathe reigned in the kitchen, and many fat morsels had made Benedict a Hercules among cats.

At the sound of a chant from the chapel opposite, a change came over Sœur Agathe, whose face was like a weather-worn gargoyle and whose features as inexpressive as a rock face on the cliffs. Her eyes flashed; for under the front door mat of the nunnery was the key, never touched by anyone but the portress. She was now in the inner court; for discipline of late was strangely relaxed. Outside there were two fields, then the village and Cousine

Berthe at the inn. In any case those were the fields she must soon cross, when her world came to an end. Why not now and with Benedict?

The sweat of fear froze on her forehead as she hurried along the stone-paved corridors and came to her Rubicon, that door mat. Benedict purred sleepily against her face —and the Rubicon was crossed. So were the fields.

"Name of a dog," cried Cousine Berthe, shaking her bright metallic coiffure, "but what has *La Couronne* to do with thy cat? Shelter I offer thee, for I am a good Christian. But wring his neck. We want no cats."

"See," pleaded Sœur Agathe, "he mouses." In vivid by-play she pounced. "He engages in combat with rats in the garret." In effect, he had once killed a baby mouse; but the sister was an artist, and would have painted him as stalking deer, had it been conceivable.

"Bah," said Cousine Berthe at last, "What care I? Shut him in the barn, if thou wilt. But it is as good as a play. I must tell *mon vieux*. Hola! Jaques," she shouted to the moustachioed Gascon lounging under the hams in the archway, "Sœur Agathe hath brought her lover with her." Their ribald laughter seemed cruel.

But she forgot all that very soon. For at the nunnery door, when she returned, there was a half-jeering crowd; and through the midst passed the file of nuns, at the head the prioress, white, but erect. Sœur Agathe felt herself to be Judas—for the nunnery gate had been watched, and she had not locked the door when she fled with the cat.

Many hours later Sœur Agathe crept into the barn beside Benedict. She was still in her nun's robes, for she had not dared to go to the house where lay dress was to have been supplied to all the Sisters. And it was only Benedict that slept that night.

In the morning Madame was frank and brutal. "A veritable mommet," she shrieked, when she saw the poor wisps of hair on her old cousin's head after the nun's wimple had gone. Sœur Agathe had dreaded that moment more than all others. But when it came she felt but the icy cold of change and loneliness.

She was stupid, very stupid, Monsieur and Madame

agreed, but she could cook. And Madame had enjoyed the flavour of her own Christianity that morning when, with fifty-five guests come to see the exit of the unfrocked nuns, she saw the *déjeuner* that Agathe cooked—*potage, salade, entremets.*

Then that same evening came the two strangers to stay at *La Couronne,* for the purpose, it was understood, of visiting, as so many foreigners do, the foundry of M. Godin, whose heavy workman's figure at the gates of the Familistère forms such a strange contrast to the airy, defiant lightness of that Camille, whom some call assassin.

Wiping his lips after dinner that night, Louis exclaimed, as soon as Madame showed her dancing earrings and powdered nose in the door of the salon, "Ah, Madame, what a cook is thine. *Ciel!* what a cook! That forcemeat pie! What would I not give for thy cook."

"Thou canst have her—for a consideration," answered Madame, jesting. "Hey, Agathe, come and see the Monsieur who does us the honour to praise thy poor cooking."

Blinking in the light, Agathe came forward.

"Here," said Madame, "Monsieur will engage thee for a chef. He will pay thee rich wages."

She shrieked with laughter, but something in the old woman's trembling hands, something, too, of pity for those of the old order who must suffer at every wave of change, had put Louis on his mettle.

"So I will," said he to Agathe, "if thou wilt go to England. I will pay good wages and thou couldst not hope for a kinder home than my wife will give thee."

"And doubtless the cat, too?" said Madame, pointing to Benedict, who had followed his mistress and was rubbing himself against her skirts.

"No, no, for they kill chickens, cats do," said Louis laughing. "But good wages for thee—and a *douceur* for Madame, if thou wilt come."

Sœur Agathe knew something of England, for her sister had lived there. Besides, there had been English visitors at the convent and one day of Cousine Berthe's ribald laughter had filled her with horror of her future as the drudge of the inn. She looked in Louis's eyes. They

were extraordinarily kind, with a dancing light behind them. Turning to Ned, he said in English:

"Poor old soul! my mother knew what it was to be a despised relation in a rich woman's house."

Then Ned understood this sudden fancy for an ugly old ex-nun.

Sœur Agathe had made up her mind.

"I will come," said she.

And, not being a Frenchwoman for nothing, she added: "With references from Monsieur and a good wage. But not without Benedict. As for the chickens, I will beat him if he touches them. Nay, nay," as Madame turned to her in a rage, "by the saints I have had enough of *La Couronne*."

So it was settled, after some chaffering, and a few days later Sœur Agathe started with Aviolet for England, with Benedict in wadded basket.

Once arrived at Upham, she proved a treasure and the borzoi, who had been victimised by kittens before, found Benedict's presence quite soothing after their frisky impertinence.

But there was sorrow in less than a week, for there came the sudden death of a chicken—and feathers were on Benedict's chops. With tightly compressed lips Sœur Agathe carried him to the scullery: his time was come. In the woman who beat him with arms like flails, he could not recognise his mistress and fled with a yell to the woods above the river.

Cecily's dinner that night was a dead failure, for Sœur Agathe could not see for sorrow and before the next night she was prowling through the woods calling "Benedict, Benedict," like a forest lover. At last, more tunable than lark to shepherd's ear, she heard a faint mee-ow. But Benedict was in evil case; his leg was in a gin, his ears were torn and his body was caked with mud.

Sœur Agathe carried him home and put his leg in a splint and in less than two days he could be seen sitting with bandaged leg and oiled head, gazing at the fire in Cecily's Dutch kitchen.

He had made the Promethean discovery on which our civilisation is based—he knew that heat improves the fla-

vour of viands. For within him were many chicken bones —cooked—and much succulent gravy. He would eat no more raw chicks.

For a short time after Aviolet's return to England there came letters from Ned full of the facts he had gone to Guise to collect for his father. He was, it appeared, spending his days in the Godin foundry, reading in the library, making friends with the workers there.

Then there came a silence and at the end of it a wire summoning his father to him. In the hour of its arrival Mrs. Strode thought of her ill-omened words with a shudder of bitter foreboding, for the boy was struck down with typhoid.

Hour after hour, on that journey through Northern France, Michael sat in the train watching the ice-laden telegraph-wires flash by, wondering how he could ever have been so foolish as to quarrel with the gift in his hand, the gift that now it seemed the gods were going to snatch from him, for in Paris there had been even worse news than the first telegram had brought.

For years it seemed there had been nothing before Strode's eyes but greyness, the sea-fog, the starkness of sand-dunes, the ice-sheathed sternness of a land where every bough wore coat of mail. In the dank stillness where no breeze blew passengers came and went for ever, puffing frosty breaths above the sheep-skins in which many of them were clad. Through the weary sleepless brain fancies passed of how he would find the boy lying when he reached him.

At last in the best bedroom of *La Couronne* which looks out on the square it was with no surprise at all that Michael found Elise leaning over the alcove-bed on which the restless figure tossed endlessly in delirium. She was as much of a dream as all else to her husband; yet he noted everything, the icy cold of the passages, the strange, damp smell of sea-weed that filled the old house, as though *La Couronne* were a wrecker's den with underground passages to the sea.

By what strange instinct Ned had asked the doctor to summon Elise, as well as his father, they would never

know. Only it was evident that in his fever it was Elise, and not the trained nursing sister, whose touch was most helpful.

With the sleeping town around them husband and wife were left alone by the boy's side, to wait for the change the Paris doctor had foretold, for although she had not slept Elise refused to allow the nurse to watch. At the end of the room, with his hand over his eyes, Michael sat by the lamp; his dream-feeling had vanished now, as through the slats of the Venetian blind he could see the vague outline of the shuttered houses enclosing the square, with beyond them the gaunt walls of the settlement of Jean André Godin. It was only with horror that he saw these now, for had they not brought the boy to this pass?

Then raising his hand slightly, he watched his wife as, half-lying, half-crouching, she made of her body a pillow for her son's head. She was lying as she had lain for—Michael could not tell how long, since moments were but leaden hours now, with her knot of hair making a dark spot on the bed-clothes. He noticed the cramped exhaustion of her pose and awoke to the fact that she was suffering. But the boy was asleep and must not be awakened.

He moved softly across the room and bending down, whispered:

"Cannot I slip my arms under him? Let me."

She opened her eyes and whispered in answer:

"No, no, I can bear it."

In the words of Mrs. Strode, Michael, too, now sensed a kind of nobleness, though how absurd the fancy was he knew.

The night went on, till the lamp began to flicker in big leaps. But the nurse had remembered everything, and Michael softly filled the globe of it from a bottle of paraffin lying on the table at his side. In the brighter light he could see his wife's face, ghastly now and drawn with pain, the eyes deep-socketed. She was thinking of nothing but of how to endure without movement or sound, while the boy's breathing above her heart shook sleeping memories that yet could rise into no consciousness for the physical agony that filled her. But Michael thought of the past, of the long corridor and the stuffed otter at Efford. It

stood opposite the front door of the inn where they had stayed, with a fish in its mouth. Elise had touched it with her hand and Michael remembered bending to kiss her forefinger: she had beautiful hands.

Then the boy moved with a choking breath and Elise cried:

"Michael, help me."

He had to lift her bodily from the bed and as he laid her on the rug by the *poêle de Godin*, he could see the sweat drops on her forehead. Putting brandy to her lips, he chafed the helpless right arm, as he slipped his hand under the wide-sleeved dressing-gown up to her shoulder. Then he drew away quickly, because of the shiver that went through him: he had touched no woman's body since he last touched hers and his mind felt a momentary revolt at her dominion over him.

Rising quickly from his knees, he went over to the bed and what he saw there quickly brought him back to the present.

When he returned from calling the nurse, Elise was kneeling by the bed; over the restless head on the pillow there was gathering a stillness that seemed to hold the alcove in its grasp.

"Is it——?" said Elise.

But the nurse's face told her. Then, going to the far end of the room where she could be ready if needed, the woman waited. She was a sister of a Nursing Order and the wide wings of her cap danced a shadow dance on the wall as she began to tell her rosary. She believed that the boy would go when the last bead dropped.

Michael put a hand on his wife's shoulder and she looked up.

"He thought of us together," she said suddenly.

Then her face sank forward on the red *duvet* that had been pushed aside and lay half-slipping from the bed. Standing above them both, Michael watched while the dream-sensation with which Nature mercifully shields our worst moments began again. Yet there was thought, too: so linked by nature, the three of them, so far from one another in everything but the flesh and the heritage of life in common. The inexplicable mystery of this linking and that

separation was behind it all, even while he watched the passing of the life round which he had woven so many hopes.

He bent towards the bed and there was the faint whisper of a smooth touch. Elise pressed her face closer into the *duvet*, for she knew what the sound meant.

Then Michael lifted her and the nurse came forward. Holding Elise, he waited till the tears came to her and gently stooping, laid his face against hers. She could feel the bony thinness of the cheek-bones, as he half-carried her across the passage to the room on the other side of the stairs that had been prepared for her.

In the dawn the inn was waking; there came from the court-yard outside the sound of pumping, and the hurried scuttle of wooden shoes. Then shrill scolding from Madame's ear-ringed, calculating, lustful face as she called to the fierce-eyed serving wench.

The sounds faded, as Elise crept under the bed coverings. Everything was unreal save the pain in her face and temples. The strained nerves danced and then came oblivion.

With a start, a sudden cry, she awoke. It all came back and unable to lie still, she rolled off the high Flemish bedstead. The room was full of daylight now and in the distant corners of the courtyard outside lurked wisps of misty vapour. Under the archway hung joints of meat and beneath them the Gascon landlord picked his teeth with a bone tooth-pick, while in the dim kitchen opposite *déjeuner* was being prepared: a mass of salad soaked in a bowl; the red-haired maid was skinning a rabbit; its eyes gaped.

Sick and shaking, Elise only asked to escape from this horrible place. The boy must not be left here among these hard people of the North. She figured to herself the artificial wreaths, the gabbling, sensual priest, the festivity of an *enterrement*, as she drew the heavy, noisy latch of the door and went downstairs to the salon, to look for Michael.

Whilst he watched her drink the coffee he had ordered, he remembered her words: "It was together that he thought of us."

At last she went over to the stove and pushing it open, sank down on the rug to let the warmth play over her chilled body. Bedraggled, wan, she was a tired woman of forty, without the services of a maid.

Then she spoke, weeping softly:

"It was better, Michael, he would have angered you often. It has been all a hopeless, hopeless mistake. Yet there were many times when he was gay."

She recalled his rag-doll, the rich colouring of his ruddy thatch, the old garret of the Georgian house, slate-fronted.

"You know I've—how I've lived?" she asked.

Michael moved restlessly, but she never noticed.

"It didn't mean much, though. Such things don't in the world where I lived when I left you. And how could a friendless woman get on without it?"

"It was my fault, I was hard," said Michael.

"No, no, I had to go and it was better for Ned's mother to learn her lesson. Oh, Ned, my Ned."

"Dear," said Michael, "don't harass yourself. Who am I or any man to judge?"

After a time she regained her composure.

"Come back to me, Elise," exclaimed Michael. "You shall hear no word from me or anyone. Come back."

She looked up, holding her breath.

"Why, why, do you say that?" she cried. "You don't care still?"

And as he walked up and down in uncontrollable agitation, he found he could not answer her. His mind with its wide sweep that could calculate far-off results had withdrawn. In its place three separate instincts reigned: a half-savage jealousy of the woman who could still allure him; a pity for the cursed untowardness of the long chain of wry circumstances that had ended thus; an upheaval of respect for the mother of his dead son; he could still see the restless head quieted by the rhythm of her heart-beats.

And so he happed on the one speakable pretext:

"Ned's mother," he said, "don't you know you are Ned's mother?"

She wondered at her conquest of the stiff-necked pride

of the man, but she had her own to match it. Tenderly, however, she answered:

"It's because of that—that I cannot do it. The past is gone forever, Michael. Neither you nor I can call it back. It isn't that I couldn't put the evil behind me. I could, I know it. But not with you, not with you. There's someone else—whom I've sent away because I wouldn't spoil his life. Oh," she cried, seeing his face, "I oughtn't to have said this to you."

"Yes, why not? I want to know. Surely we may speak plainly. You want legal release, to be free from me. Perhaps you ought to have had it years ago. But I shrank from it."

"It's no use, now, Michael. I've put it all from me. He's young, ambitious, I should nearly ruin him. There isn't anything you can do for me now. Not even release me."

"Is that really so?" he asked, coming over and looking down on her, while the pity of this coil of mistake in which they were both entangled writhed at his heart.

"Really," she repeated. "Oh, I've hurt you."

"Never mind, Elise," he said, "we've hurt each other, that's the truth, isn't it?"

Then they spoke quietly of the boy, of his resting-place, of the journey to Paris next day. She was glad he would lie in French soil, after all, for she had always seen him in the sunshine, this ruddy-haired boy of hers and Michael's.

CHAPTER XII

THE KEY OF THE DOOR

"So this," said Mr. Costelow, "is Michael's contribution to the salvation of the world. Well, it looks water-tight and wind-tight, but 'tisn't precisely a temple of Apollo, seen at this particular minute."

He was standing by Mrs. Strode's side looking round at the interior of the Familistère. With the grey shafts of misty light from the roof falling on asphalt floor, on iron-girders and white bricks, it was certainly plain to the verge of ugliness. For "the equivalent of wealth to the worker" does not yet include gabled manor houses or turreted castles; so far, it merely means an absence of squalor.

"Listen," said Mrs. Strode, holding up her hand.

They chanced to be standing just outside the nurseries which occupied the whole of one side of the ground floor. From within came the cheeping of tiny voices, the echoes of a cradle-song.

"So," said Mr. Costelow again, "the boy's gone, Cecilia."

"Yes, Michael comes back to-night," answered Mrs. Strode.

"How'll he bear it?" asked her brother, bending shaggy eyebrows.

"As he does everything. Almost without a sign. You know the boy never had much of a hold on life. I felt that he'd go when I heard it was typhoid. I always knew his life was just nothing but a candle flame flickering in a draught."

Mr. Costelow watched her, feeling that his sister's buoyancy was a broken thing. She looked older to-day than he could ever have imagined it possible for Cecilia to look.

"Back to-night," said he. "Well, I shan't stay. Better have no fuss. 'Tisn't as if I could do any good."

"The lad's gone; let the water close over him," said Mrs. Strode bitterly to herself.

"There's Philippa at last," she added aloud, as they caught sight of a slim, alert figure in grey passing swiftly along the gallery overhead.

"So that," said Mr. Costelow, "is the young woman I've heard so much of. Carries herself well. Knows she's worth something, I should say."

"Philippa Halliday does everything perfectly," answered Mrs. Strode icily, with a sort of hatred in her heart at the calm strength that is apparently above all the sorrows that break more vivid natures.

Mr. Costelow watched their cicerone curiously as she took them through the various departments, showing everywhere the knowledge of the expert; the schools, the library, the wash houses, and the co-operative shops crowded now with early morning buyers. He thought her hard until, throwing open the doors of the nurseries, she took them into the place where her heart was.

It was the prettiest room in the building, long, low, white with unpolished floors for the better grip of the stumbling feet. At the end a glazed door gave access to the sleeping-place with its white-draped rows of swing cots. As Philippa explained the difficulty they had experienced in finding a suitable material for the beds, Mr. Costelow watched the light coming and going in a transformed face. Old "Mamma Ju-Ju," round-about and comfortable, trotted the children out and showed the working of the "baby-cage" where in the narrow curving alley between a double line of low wooden railings several children at once could learn to walk without risk of tumbles. It was evident that every corner of Europe had been scoured for any invention that could wisely foster these first years of life. But it was in the babies' garden, with turf spaces open to the south, that Philippa's pleasure o'erleapt itself.

"Now come," said Mr. Costelow at last, "what do you really calculate you're doing here, you and Michael? Between ourselves now, what's the upshot of it all? You can't live for ever, and when you're gone, do you actually imagine that this system will be carried on?"

"Come here, Mr. Costelow, please, and look at this," said Philippa. On the balcony overlooking the garden was a wonderfully contrived couch invented by a famous surgeon,

on which lay a cripple boy. "He's being cured, for he's had the best advice in the world. Before he's twelve, they say he'll walk and run. Then look at these."

She pointed to a game of "a ring-a-ring-a-rosies" going on between a dozen trotting babies.

"Pretty, but just as well in the street," sniffed Mr. Costelow.

"Wait a bit," said Philippa. "Tell me. Do they look to you in any way physically inferior to the children in rich nurseries? Any little white-faced starvelings, any skin diseases, dirt, poverty smell?"

"No," said Mr. Costelow.

"And remember they're better off than rich children, for they always find companions here in plenty if their mothers choose to leave them for a few hours whenever the housework presses. They learn here, from the time they're only a few months old, to give and take, to treat each other gently. They share and love."

She stopped, her eyes filled with darting tears, for her thoughts had flown to one who had shared and loved greatly.

"Yes, all well and good now," persisted Mr. Costelow, "but what about the time when you and Michael are gone?"

"We have, going in and out, nearly forty children here now and in a few years there will have been hundreds. Hundreds given a good start of health and strength and kindness and hope. And if it all dies down here, as I quite realise it may, nay, will, yet Michael Strode will have written his word—*the treasure of human life*—across some hundreds of existences. For every child is a centre of ever-growing power and not one of them will be left unmarked by Mamma Ju-Ju's work."

"And by Mamma Philippa's," said the old man with a bow, "for I heard what the youngsters called out."

"That's not all," she continued, "for if the men of the Phoenix Works let this system die down, in time I believe the municipal authorities will set up child shelters on this model, which Michael borrowed from Godin's. They're beginning in vague tentative ways already, in fact. I'm certain this is one way up out of the welter of wasted powers that's going on everywhere around us. There will be born again, from this little cradle, a wiser care for the babies."

"The true Phoenix, in fact," said Mr. Costelow, standing aside to let her pass out to Mrs. Strode who had not dared this morning to enter the nurseries. Then the old man walked away with the foreman to inspect the foundries while the two women were left alone.

"Philippa," said Mrs. Strode, "I can't come up to-night to see Michael. I should do no good. I can't."

Her lips were trembling; Philippa put a hand gently on her arm.

"Better not," she said quietly, "Michael will want all the strength we can give him. We mustn't show him a weak moment."

"But," flashed Mrs. Strode, "he wants help. Philippa, can't you give it? If you can't, nobody can. What are you going to do? He's in prison."

"I know, mother," said Philippa.

Neither of them noticed the word she had used, for the first time in her life. Then she said, "I'll take whatever there is between us and break it down and stand on it."

There was the flash in her eyes that is seldom seen on a woman's impassive face, trained to lines of calm. It is a fiercer, more irresistible force in its onslaught than the long, slow, down-bearing will of the man. And Mrs. Strode went home thinking of the foundry fires banked up for hours, but fed continuously in preparation for the half-hour's fierce flare that creates. There had passed into Philippa's being something of the foundry's nature.

All that day she waited for the hour that was to bring Michael home and, like a man who stands deep in the winding recesses of a cave with the roar of invisible breakers in his ears, she could distinguish the sounds of the far-off sea of her own nature.

Again and again she went to the door of the old Georgian house by the Works to see if he were in sight. When at last he appeared she could see the dust of fatigue and depression on his face and throwing the door wide open in sign of welcome, felt thankful that she had not left him to return to face a lonely evening. They spoke of nothing save the journey, while Philippa busied herself with the homely details of his comfort, knowing in her mind that he was relying

on her self-control for strength; selfish as it might seem, she felt even happy in the knowledge.

The influence of the familiar room began to assert itself at last and even the bureau laden with piles of letters seemed a sheet anchor in the shifting strangeness of these last days, only realised as they were by the external mind. After supper he went across to the desk.

"Must you?" asked Philippa. "Can't they wait till to-morrow?"

"I can't rest till it's all done," said he.

And drawing round herself the calmness on which Michael had so long rested, Philippa filled the room with the power of her steadfast quiet.

At length the click of her typewriter ceased and gathering up the letters, "That's the last," she said. She was longing now to break through the silence that lay between them, like a non-conducting medium through which no impulse from her could reach him.

"I'll take them to the post," he said, "then I'll see you home."

"I'm staying here to-night," she answered quietly. "I made my arrangements to do so, for I would not let you sup and breakfast alone."

"Thank you, Philippa, it was like you to think of it."

With a pang at which her heart rebelled she noticed how he took her staying, unconventional as it was, as a matter of course. Had she ever, she asked herself bitterly, been a woman in his eyes at all?

Later on she stood at her window, watching the dark outline of Michael's figure pacing in and out between the box-edged flower beds of the garden. The frost had broken and the south-wester was blowing flying scuds of cloud across the sky, dimly lighting the foundry buildings, allowing flashes of moonlight to pierce through on the outward memorials of their work together. She drew a breath of tense rebellion at the shackling fetters that bound her. Never once, she told herself, in all these long years had he seen her as anything but a means to an end: she was, indeed, one of the people whose personality is the weakest thing about them.

What memories this house must have for him to-night!

Over on the other side of the landing was the room where Elise and Ned had slept, now silent, dust-shrouded.

Then from the hill above came the hollow note of a church clock—one. And at half-past seven next morning the wheels of work would begin to turn once more for her and Michael. But to-night she was alive, while still the restless pacing went on in the garden; the wind was blowing the clouds away and against it she could faintly discern the light of the sky above the Basin. Opening her door, she went quietly downstairs, and across the hall. Then standing in the open doorway, she waited till he might turn and see her.

"Philippa," said he, stopping for a moment, "what are you doing here?"

"Let me walk with you," she answered, coming towards him.

And going back into the hall, he fetched an Inverness cape of his own, which he fastened over her shoulders. Under the lee of the house wall they sat down on a low wooden bench, while the faint scent of the cape, with the familiar flavour of his tobacco clinging to it, brought a trace of warmth to her cold, trembling limbs.

"His mother was there when he died," he said at last.

Her heart thudded with jealousy, with fear, with mad, irrational anger.

"The boy had sent for her before he became unconscious," he went on. "She is changed, very greatly changed."

"Such a life as hers would change a woman," said Philippa, speaking as though something not herself had taken charge of her lips.

He glanced at her and then looked away quickly, a trick that was customary with him when something awkward had been said.

"No," he answered, "that was not what I meant. She has been through the fire. She strikes a different note!"

"After playing a fantasia in adultery, I suppose you mean," exclaimed Philippa fiercely. Beacon-fires flashed from hill-top to hill-top of her mind, carrying their message of coming storm.

He was silent, in anger, she supposed, at the coarseness of her words, which were, however, the feeblest echo of the bitterness that overwhelmed her. Obeying a restless im-

pulse, she rose. Then he said quietly, answering her by instinct:

"You don't understand. As long as Ned was alive, there was a link between us. There is none now."

Yet to her woman's perception there was now the link that had been absent during the years of their separation, for Elise was no longer to Michael merely a mistake that he had put aside, but once more something that aroused feeling; a feeling finer than jealousy, harder than love.

Philippa knew now that, had it been in her power, she would have intercepted the telegram summoning Michael to Guise, would even have kept mother and son apart, so that she might succeed in keeping husband and wife from each other.

Upstairs once more in her room, with the sound of Michael's footsteps on the floor below instead of in the garden, she glanced at herself in the glass. It was an exercise of which she was not fond, but to-night she was by no means inclined to under-value the forceful face with the quiet eyes; it was neither withered nor faded, being kept from both by the antiseptic of the brain. Yet in the call that woman makes to man, the call of "Who is on my side, who?" she had failed—utterly, incomprehensibly. She turned out the light at last with the reflection that the real antiquity of the earth is neither sphinx nor neolithic flint, but man, for he is so extraordinarily changeless.

Across the room, when she awoke half an hour later, the street lamp was casting bars of light like an irregular ladder on the wall opposite her bed. She lay as she had fallen asleep, with hands folded on her breast, and in the attitude of the dead she quivered now with a force of life that had risen in her, torrent-like. The racking jealousy was gone; she remembered nothing but a phrase in Michael's letter: "I have no son."

No son—and no wife. Surely, if his words this evening meant anything, they meant that. And she had waited twenty years. Slipping across the room, she opened the door, for from the landing she could look over the banisters to the hall below; there was a ray of light coming from the dining-room. Michael must be there still.

In the silence she could hear the distant crowing of a cock.

Very full of childish memories it was, of the curiously cut box-trees in her aunt's garden, of the thrill of joy felt in every common thing in those distant days, a joy that was hers to-night.

Then Michael moved and there came the noise of paper being torn, of his chair being pushed back. She knew every familiar sound in this house where she was yet a stranger. Could she give Michael what he wanted, the daring leap over the barriers of silence and coldness, into the inner sanctuary of his nature?

Through the long narrow window at the back of the stairs a ray of light fell across the winding staircase, with its thin old balustrade, polished by the friction of many hands. She could see herself stealing down, the light irradiating her figure for a moment as she passed. Her eyes fixed in dream, she tried to think how it would be. As she pushed back the heavy hair from her forehead, she measured the goodness of life, calculated the fine moments through which she had lived, moments when her unswerving purpose had been Michael's staff. Even now, she knew herself blessed beyond any beloved woman whose tenderness of surrender has raised to bliss the sanctification of a moment's passion.

Yet Michael suffered, was alone, and full of sorrowful thoughts. He had missed a sweetness that she craved to give and she would never again be so near him as to-night. Pallid and cold, she went back to her room for a wrapper; the restless pacing began again. The moments were flying, while she weighed the three alternatives of the middle-aged woman—to wither; to submit to the humiliation of the women of the darkness who read, or think they read, in the eyes of the man they love, the scorn the deceived world would pay them openly, did it but know; or to lower the ideal of marriage and mate with a nature on a far lower plane than her own.

It was all beside the point: the only fact now was Michael's need of help. The fire was dying in the grate, the fire of passion and longing, the stars were rising now, the stars of love that might be beacon lights of comfort to the man who would ask for nothing, but take whatever she gave—as he had always done.

He looked up from his desk to see her standing in the

doorway motionless. Their eyes locked and then, with the wavering movement of a sleep-walker, she crossed the floor to him. In an instant her arms were round him, as she drew his shaggy, grey-streaked head against her breast and crying, whispered:

"My dear, my dear, you shall not bear it alone. Let me share it. Let me share it," then, breaking down completely, fell to tears.

He lay resting against her quietly for a time, till putting up his hands, he drew her face down till their lips met.

When she raised her head at last, Philippa's eyes fell on a large sheet of paper on the desk in front of him. It was her own handwriting and she stood at gaze to read, while burning flushes turned her face to crimson.

Michael watched her with a smile, as her eyes followed these lines:

THE WAY OF A WOMAN

My babe, whose nestling touch alone can wake
Ancestral memories of familiar things;
The brooding stillness of high summer-noon,
The windy darkness of keen winter-dawn,
The nursing-cry of lambs from flower-strewn bank,
The merry tinkle of the milking pail.

My sweet, the groping of thy soft, red lips
Awakes the wonder at the heart of things,
The first faint purple on the hills of love,
The mystery of maiden-awe before that dawn,
The splendid thrill of agony divine,
The spell of silence; then thy lips, my own.

"Oh, oh," she cried, "I never knew I left *that* among your papers."

The floor all round was strewn with old letters that he had been sorting.

"Did you write it, Philippa? Did you?" he asked. "It told me more about you than anything I ever read before. It was a wonderful sweet message, dear. It took me by storm. And then I looked up and saw you standing there."

Her face answered his question.

It was, in a way, a summing up of his life, this investigation of the contents of his bureau which he had at first begun

merely to wile away the hours of a sleepless night. For here were letters from Ned, and reading here and there, he could see traces of Elise in them, little tricks of thought, small lies and prevarications. Then in the midst had come Philippa's poor little verses, so contrary to all he knew of her, yet such a key to her womanliness. It was with half-reverence, half-passion, that he had read, thus opening with no unsacrilegious hand the doorway to her heart.

Then looking down on her, as she rested with the perfect contentment of port after stormy seas, he knew that by her act and his knowledge they had been brought to the real conflict which silence would have avoided. Yet she was so happy that he dreaded to break the spell.

"Philippa," he said at last, shrinking as one hesitates to wake an unconscious sleeper to inevitable sorrow, "Philippa, we can't—act as though the past had never been."

Opening her eyes she gazed at him blankly.

"You love me, don't you?" she said.

"You know I do."

"What then?"

"I'm tied and bound. Don't you see? This—your feeling and mine—alters nothing. God! don't make things harder, and yet pretend to comfort."

They stood opposite each other; she in dazed surprise, he, irritated and ashamed.

"Tied?" she cried, "she loosed herself years ago! Oh, how can you go back to that old folly?"

Even as she spoke the vanity of her own words o'erwhelmed her, for Michael, unfettered by the superstitions of the brain, was singularly shackled by the superstitions of the temperament; all who were bound to him, he would never let go. They would never, any of them, escape from this shadow.

"Don't, don't look like that, my dear," he cried, "my dear, my dear, you've made the world different to me to-night. But I can't lower your standard. You're too dear to me for that."

"Then," she said, "I must go. I can't stay here. Oh, you thought," she cried, laughing bitterly, "that after *this* everything would go on as before. Well, it can't. I've starved long enough. Now you know." Then narrowing

her eyes, she said: "Can you tell what were the words that brought me down here to-night? They were: 'I have no son.'"

The air throbbed in their ears. Then the blind lifted slightly in the wind and fell with a jerk.

Philippa awoke, and coming over to Michael, put her two hands on his shoulders; she had seen in a flash as quick as the falling of the blind that her first impulse which had seemed a sacrifice was but selfishness, after all. It was his standard, not hers, that she dared not lower.

"Forgive me," she said. "I fancied I thought only of you, for to me it would have meant no suffering at all. In your happiness I should have forgotten everything irregular. Yet you cannot injure me, without injuring yourself more. I suppose it would have been a hurt. God knows! Yet I would have kept nothing back, body nor soul."

Michael could not speak and so they stood, looking into each other's eyes. Then his arms locked round her and in the force of them she could not but feel the reality of his passion.

It was a very proud woman who went gravely upstairs a moment later, for there is no greater moment in a woman's life than when she feels beneath her feet the cold touch of the marble pedestal on which her lover has placed her; yet it is much sweeter perhaps when the pedestal totters.

CHAPTER XIII

CONFLICT

WHEN Michael read Philippa's note of farewell the next morning, with his feet in the cinders of the path outside the office, whilst the black smoke poured across the roofs, it was of a sentence of Aviolet's that he thought: "The book I am writing makes me uneasy; it is the book I am going to write which comforts me." For change "book" to any other achievement and the saying sums up man's fears and hopes. With the loss of Philippa it seemed that there had passed away from him that vision of success which flickers before a man in the distance, gay with the dawn colours in youth, golden with man's strength, and waning to grey in the on-coming of old age. It was only when she was gone that he grasped how much her confidence, her faith in him, had meant.

To Philippa, it was the madness of her own act that appalled her, as she lay in her room in the great London hotel, while outside there was the silence of long, thickly carpeted corridors, only broken now and again by shrill voices, or by the sound of the chambermaids' keys being fitted into locks. It seemed the madness of an impish urchin, hurling a stone at a fair glass house, that wild act of hers the night before. For all that makes life worth living she had enjoyed for years; the satisfaction of effort winning its due meed in work done, the appreciation and respect of thousands. She lay picturing to herself over and over again the cottage rooms where she was received on a footing of kindly equality, where she had full satisfaction for the instincts of friendliness, where she was at home. Now at one blow it was all gone, home, work, friends—and Michael, for the folly of a certain womanly craving that for years she had stifled. Scourging herself she lay devising tortures, seeing where Michael would make mistakes;

always he had trusted to her instinctive divination of character, for he was himself a man of no observation in human nature, being more at home with the cantankerousness of material than with the cunning, the weakness, or the brutality of the temperament. He had, moreover, been accustomed to say of his schemes: "Do this," and it was done—in its details usually by Philippa.

Thus the weight descended till in the darkness of her thoughts it was a surprise to look out over the parapet of her room and see the people hurrying by in the afternoon sunlight of the street below, as cheerfully occupied with commonplace bustle as though no one had ever agonised, or felt the world shiver into atoms beneath his feet. Oceans seemed to have rolled between herself of last night and this present one; the former had been quivering with life, the latter was dazed, conscious only of utter loneliness. The world stretched before her now a straight road marked only by the milestones of the years.

She thought of the hours of the day as Michael was living them now, while her heart cried quietly like a lost and frightened child. The room grew darker as the winter day drew to a close and once she started up on her elbow with heart beating wildly, at the fancied sound of Michael's voice in her ears. In the riot of the blood she trembled from head to foot and then remembered the absurdity of the idea.

Thought faded, the pulses throbbed into quiet and sleep came, a sleep from which she awoke feeling the tears forcing themselves beneath her closed eyelids. "So lonely; so lonely"; she said to herself, and then knew that in sleep she had been comforted. Pausing now in the dusky vestibule of the slumber-world, she felt able to go back into sleeping consciousness, given leave by some unknown power. There a stone was somehow lifted from her heart, while again she felt herself lapped close in sheltering arms that clasped her, wrapping every part of her, one by one, in an enfolding that brought, not warmth as physical contact would have done, but the comfort of a love immeasurably greater than anything she had known before, a love from some personality higher than her own, but not too high to understand. Finally it seemed that hands

were placed beneath the soles of her feet, hands that uplifted, as one might raise a lonely, blubbering child with face besmothered by tears. Somewhere, too, there was laughter.

Then the room came back and it almost seemed that dim, mysterious presences hovered between the plate-glass doors of the wardrobe and the window. She was happy, with a curious elusive happiness that she feared to lose by facing the physical world again.

But she must come to close grapples with her lot, after all; there was something to which she must become accustomed and she knew in a moment what it was, for the weight on her heart had been laid there by hate, as well as loneliness.

When at length Philippa found herself in the pit of the Coronet Theatre waiting for the curtain to go up on the play in which, as she saw from the papers, Elise was acting, she was deliberately forcing herself to look, not only into the face of the woman she hated, but into the very eyes of her own weakness. Lifting her head proudly with burning fever-spots on her cheeks, she faced the cold horror of her own shrinking, as once she had forced herself to drop a stone on the head of a rabbit found screaming in a trap.

She was surrounded by a group of women with whom her mind instantly placed her in sympathy and insensibly the echoes of their talk, keen, alert, sparkling with many impersonal interests, supplied an escape from her own self-centred trouble. From these journalists, art students, and teachers around her she caught every now and then sentences that from men's lips would have been merely boring, but coming from women were full of the breath of the new time. For, although they might one and all be living within the ring-fence of seclusion that man's blindness had placed around them, they had, at any rate, risen above the helpless inefficiency that starved in corners less than thirty years ago. Self-reliant, independent, trained, they had a value in the market place quite apart from their sex-value. They stood on their own feet, they had escaped from that preoccupation with their bodies that has been the despair of the past, as far as women are

concerned: the harem superstition was broken. A joy in her own power of brain awoke Philippa's will to live with a thrill that turned it into the courage to live. By God, swore she, in words not blasphemous, but reverent, shall a woman crawl because she's hungry? Hungry! all the world's hungry, and often the woman who has love will barter it for excitement. She herself had a better thing than either.

Yet, as Philippa could not fail to know, these women, for all their great value to their sex, form, after all, one of the most hopeless signs of our bad economy and incapacity for adapting ourselves to new conditions. For, when all the world is crying out for fine births, these, who are the most worthy of the high calling of mother, are shut within an almost conventual seclusion by the folly of social laws, and remain celibate—with all the damage to life and sanity in themselves and all the loss to the community that such a fact implies.

No one can be purely wise and in the thought of her own rebound from humiliation, Philippa felt pharisaically that she was not as these women were, for she had at any rate plumbed the emotional depths of her nature. Had she not, by the opening of the gates that guard love and sorrow, deepened the powers of her temperament and by actual living gained the thrill that these women waited for so keenly whilst they followed the analysis of a passionate problem, as shown by Balmaine? For it is, in plain fact, not the men, who do live, but the women who don't, who form the support of the modern drama with its probings of the uncomfortable possibilities of the unknown. If man lives not by bread alone, women certainly cannot live by work alone, women whose mentality starves without emotional fire. Philippa felt herself more of a woman than these others.

Then she forgot all else and gripping her cold hands tightly, waited for Madame Renouf to appear; the pallor of her face made her neighbour look at her curiously.

At first Philippa saw only pigmy figures in front of her, for the stage seemed to have retreated to an illimitable distance as though seen through a powerful glass. Then

her senses returned as she became aware that the name-part was not being played by Michael's wife, as advertised.

When the curtain went down at the end of the first act, she turned to the girl next her and said:

"Surely, that is not Madame Renouf playing. I used to know her, years ago, it is true, but she cannot be so changed as this."

A dark-skinned woman, with upper lips moustachioed, and bright, vivid eyes, hearing the question, turned round and told her that Madame Renouf was supposed to be ill, had not acted for days—and the manager tearing his few remaining hairs, added her informant, who was evidently enjoying the sense of being better informed than her fellows.

Before the curtain went up on the second act, Philippa had reached the street. There she stood gazing at the long row of street-lights, while a merciless illumination within showed up the monstrous unseemliness of the joy and hope that she felt far back in her mind. She was relieved, elated, could have sung aloud for gladness. Yet she felt baffled, baulked, after the pitch of decision up to which she had worked herself.

She knew where Elise lived and presently stood opposite the great towering mass of brightly lit flats. What would Michael have her do? This was the question she asked, standing in hesitation before the doorway.

The spell of her trained will brought her up the stairs to the entrance of the flat, but she refused the lift lest it should spring decision on her unawares. Once at Elise's door, however, the current of things changed, for the maids were helpless, bewildered and ready to confide in the merest stranger. Madame would see no one, it appeared, and Monsieur Balmaine was abroad. The manager had stormed, but the play was running its last days. Besides, what could he do?

"*Mon Dieu,*" cried Marie. "She may be dead. There is the silence of the grave in there."

She pointed across the hall to the closed door of her mistress's bedroom.

Philippa held her breath in the darkness, after she had closed the door on the circle of waiting women, for there was someone speaking from the bed. It was a toneless

voice that sounded through the heavy air of the shut-up place. The lips of the speaker were dry and parched.

"God, God," said Elise. "Do you hear? Answer me!"

Growing accustomed to the darkness, Philippa could see a bare arm uplifted with clenched fist. Moving as steadily as possible in order to avoid a suggestion of stealthiness, she drew near the bed.

"Who is it?" cried Elise.

"Someone you knew long ago," answered Philippa, taking the cold hands in hers and chafing them gently. Then going across to the window she slightly turned the blind, while Elise's gaze followed her.

"Who is it?" repeated Elise.

Presently the room was flooded with the shaded light from an electric cluster in the ceiling and Elise saw who it was.

"You?" she whispered. "Why did you come? Did he send you?"

"No," answered Philippa, "I heard you were ill. I had to come."

There was an icy barrier between them that Philippa knew she must break down, for now, as she heaped eider-down on Elise's chilled body, opened the window and lit the fire, these acts served only as outward symbols of the life and warmth she wanted to apply to the self enshrined in the body she tended with deft, steady movements. But Elise lay quite still, with all her energies bent, it seemed, on resisting the stream of comfort. At last she jerked away her head from the steaming bowl of soup that Philippa brought her.

"No, no, I can't," she cried.

But Philippa lifted her gently and held a spoonful to her lips. Elise sipped and then suddenly burst into tears.

"I wanted to die. Oh, how dare you? How dare you? There isn't anything to live for now."

She beat the coverlet furiously in the rage of hungry craving for some comfort, some rest, something on which the heart could pause.

Understanding by the lesson of her own pain, Philippa lay down beside her and gathering the chilled limbs,

cherished her with hands and heart and all the warmth of soul and body, till Elise clung to her like a child.

"I thought I didn't care for him, my little son," whispered she, "I never knew how I cared till I lost him. Then I saw what I looked like in his eyes. And I never can wipe away that look from his eyes, now he's gone. For he's dead, you know. Ah, my God, my God, I've been asleep all these years. And Michael never loved me. There never was anything of me for him to love."

Then her mind went off on another tack.

"Philippa," she whispered, "tell me, you've always loved him?"

"Yes," said Philippa simply, as she lay looking across the firelit room where the redness pulsed on walls and ceiling. "I've always loved him."

She could feel the heart above her beating till it shook the two bodies into a close-knit movement; she knew the question that was coming, as well as did the brain that conceived it.

"And you? You came to triumph over me? He is your lover?"

"No, no," cried Philippa. "No. He would not have it so. I offered myself. He came back in such misery. And I loved him. I didn't care what I did. I wanted to help, but he wouldn't have me. I offered myself. Then I came away. It was last night."

There flashed for a moment in Elise's eyes the baseness of triumph and she put her lips on Philippa's, half with an access of satisfaction that nothing could suppress, half with a pain that was finer than anything she ever had known before. For she had not misunderstood.

"Ah," she cried, "he cares for you like that. I've had many lovers, but I've never been loved like that. I never could be, you see. Now they are all shadows to me. Oh yes, I can remember how this one looked at me, how that one came into the room. I remember; they are things that happened, of course, but they don't mean anything now. It's all over. A thing must be very, very high to last long."

Then it all came back, the one thing that was not a shadow, the thing of which she could not speak even to

Philippa. For on her return from Paris she had found a visitor waiting for her. It was Madame Auriol, shrieking out news whose full effect she had come on purpose to watch.

"Ah, my dear," she cried, "so you're from Paris. Then I'm the first to tell you. I'm so glad, for I'm sure you'll be so wildly interested to hear it, such a friend of yours as he was."

Leaning back in her place, with a muff held up to hide her lips, Elise waited, knowing what was coming. It was Raymond Olivier, news of him. This woman, this jay-like creature covered all over with spoils of every living thing, including man, would only have come with one intention.

She had sat listening in a dream, getting colder and colder, while she heard the news of Olivier's engagement to a beautiful girl, not yet twenty, with political connections, a fair, pale blonde of the purest English type, it appeared.

"Delightful," said Madame Renouf, "and that reminds me. I have a card for the big Liberal reception to-night. I must go and congratulate him. I shouldn't like not to be one of the first to do so. You know he and I were great pals."

"So I always thought," said Madame Auriol, watching lynx-like, but finding little enough to satisfy her.

It was a splendid figure that appeared after the play that evening at the top of the great staircase, for Madame Renouf had never acted so well in her life, had never dressed so carefully. Dead-white she stood, with vivid lips and eyes shifting from one to another as she talked. Then at last she saw them; yes, the girl was beautiful in a childish way, big eyes, soft skin, hair limp on the nape of the neck. Why didn't she change her maid? The coils looked as moist as West country air feels.

Olivier hesitated and his eyes wavered as the crowd, apparently moved by a common impulse, made room for him and his fiancée. Jeanne was superb, waiting there for him to come to her, with the girl; the eyes that watched her saw nothing but the heartiest kindness. Only when he turned away the actress sighed low and quick, an irrepressible quick lifting and falling of the breast that seemed to kill something within. All she could remember

afterwards was the curious appearance of Olivier's back, the bowed, half-aged look of it as he bent towards the girl who raised her head, flushed and laughing at him. She was, in fact, elated at meeting a woman of whom everyone talked, like this Madame Renouf. Raymond Olivier was a much finer catch than she had realised, for he knew so many more interesting people than she had imagined.

Now, lying by Philippa on the bed to which she had returned after her tilt with mocking fortune, her mind turned to Michael once more.

"And all these years I've stood between you and him," she said. "But I never meant it. I wanted to be happy in my own way. He might have been happy in his, for all I cared. But he never changes. Never will begin again. What will you do now?"

"Get work to do, writing perhaps. I don't know. I'm an expert, you see," she laughed bitterly.

"But not away from him. Oh, Philippa, 'tis your life. And he has nothing now. Oh, you cannot leave him."

"How can I stay?" asked Philippa quietly. "Don't you realise? We could never be at ease together. No, no, I'll never see him again."

"And this is what I'm doing," whispered Elise to herself. "I, who care for nothing more now in all the world. But I should like to make him happy, I who have never done anything for him at all, never anything at all. Oh, I should like to see the foundry again and the ugly old house. Is it just the same and does the elm tree creak as it used to do?"

But Philippa could not answer, so great was her heart-sickness of longing.

"I should like to see it again," repeated Elise, "and I should like to give joy to you and Michael, I who have given nothing all my life. 'Tis I only, who stand in the way, as I have always done."

But Philippa was worn out, and soon Elise could hear the deeper breathing that showed she was asleep. Leaning on her elbow she watched the sleeper, noting the thinning of the hair over the temples, the ample dignity of the fine limbs. Softly she touched a lock of dark, curl-less

hair; the brow was beginning to show the long wrinkles that come even to the most serene. After all, this woman had had the best of it, thought Elise, for how gladly would she herself have bartered all the ease and pleasure of the past to win what Philippa had. Strangely enough, all through, Elise assumed that Michael's refusal meant, not indifference, but respect.

Then Elise's brain came back to the event that had cast her here on her bed, longing, like a child, to vent her spite on the universe by death, a death that, however important it might seem to her, would barely make the smallest newspaper ripple. All she could give to any man was release. Between Michael and the woman by her side, who could give him everything, there stood only herself.

The wind in the trees of the Park murmured now of the sea, as shivering with the cold of the earth, of its water and its wind, Elise lay shrinking from the loneliness of the path.

Crossing the floor softly at length, she went to her dressing room and half an hour later, muffled to the ears in heavy furs, looked in on Philippa, still asleep. Elise realised that Michael would never pry on a woman, would never be so practical as to set detectives to watch. Philippa might give him idolatry, but the woman who had known many men, felt a half-scorn of his dreamy aloofness from the common ways of life.

Once she had helped the man she loved: now she would help the man she did not. Around her she could already feel the void that was her best gift to the struggling world and hardly sane as was the thought, it ruled her. Flashing then into the future, Elise saw the lives these two would build together. But she could not visualise them at the foundry, for it must be so altered since her day. With the idea came a definite vision of what she had to do, of what she wanted to see before the end.

CHAPTER XIV

UNITY

In the dim half-light of the following morning, Philippa awoke with a sudden start as though something had called her. But she found herself alone; at any rate Elise was gone from the room, nor was there any sound coming from the dressing-room. Then, as she started up, her eyes caught the flutter of paper on the coverlet. It was a note that had been pinned there:

"Don't be sorry for me. Never be sorry, for I'm going to the best thing I've ever had. There is but one thing I can give, I who have given nothing all my life. Tell Michael that I did it for him and that I'm sorry for all the trouble I've been to him. But perhaps I shall see him before you do. It is so strange to watch you sleeping there. I never knew you very well before, but now you will go back to him and be to him all that I might have been and was not. Good-bye, Philippa."

In a moment she had grasped the purport of the words, of whose meaning there was but one doubt.

"Perhaps I shall see him before you do"; from which side did she mean?

Philippa could not be sure, but as there flashed into her mind Elise's question about the house and the old elm, she felt convinced that the meaning denoted was a return to Exminster. A return to Exminster and to Michael; leaning over, clasping her knees, Philippa rocked herself to and fro in a fierce flame of jealousy—even then.

But she must not think, she must know, and to stay here while Elise was gone to—she knew not what, was impossible.

Sitting up in bed she thought rapidly, envisaging what had to be done. First she must make sure that Elise had

really gone; then, in a quick flash recalling the western-bound trains, she remembered as she looked at the clock that in less than an hour there would be an express starting, from another station, just twenty minutes later than the one Elise might have caught. With deft hands and thoughts she dressed and overcame the main difficulty of getting to the station. She felt as though the stars were with her in the early awaking from her exhausted sleep, so long before Elise had expected it. With the rush and roar of the express, as the wind blew in on her face and the country flew by, she felt the irradiation of a great hope, some revelation, some reading of the riddle of things; what, she knew not.

At the first station she wired to Michael warning him that Elise was probably on her way West and must be detained if she came to him. Philippa had felt it a difficult message to word before she entered the office, but once there, the sentences came to her mind, shaping themselves, as though before her the bars and bolts of difficulty that Easterns call the tamasic quality of things, the inertia of the material, were going down before her. The noises of the train sounded like the bourdon of her heart, as leaping forward it over-ran the swiftest rush of wood and steel, of fire and steam. Her muscles tightened and her nerves strained in the on-leap. In some strange way she was with Elise in her lonely abandonment as, hungry for what life denies to all save the most exalted spirits, she stormed the heights of death to win what only ages of struggle can gain —the peace that is at one with the universe.

Wrapt in dream as she was, it was sheer pain when in the sickly yellow light the train thundered into Exminster. For here she could not rely on the electric messages that seemed to thrill her, but must trust to the quieter, less confident processes of thought. With the stopping of the train, the flowing period of excitement ended.

At the foundry came the first check, for there she found that Michael was away and not expected back till evening; her wire, of course, lay awaiting him, unopened. Philippa felt as though an iron door had gone down in front of her, while on the other side there was going on a drama to which she alone had the key.

The hideous hours that followed at the hotel had, fortunately for her afterwards, no outstanding points on which memory could hang its reiterated phases that stupefy the brain. And by evening the trail was caught again, for they reported at the foundry that a lady had been enquiring for Michael and going away disappointed had walked towards the ferry.

There, when Philippa enquired, the inertia of things leapt at her again, for the lady was gone, had hired a boat and vanished down the Canal, while Philippa vainly tried to induce the ferryman to find a quick rower to follow the boat in front. No, he could not, leastways not for half an hour, the best in his power was to let her hire one herself. The world was showering good luck on him, it seemed, for there was a small pile of silver on the table in his shanty, change due from Elise's half sovereign when she returned with the boat.

Mirrored in the water passed the shadows of the two women as they rowed downwards towards the sea. Up into the sky against the background of hills flamed the furnace fires, down over the meadows rolled a solid column of black smoke, passing far overhead, above the great block of the Familistère that rose with twinkling lights beginning to show dimly here and there in its tall, gaunt walls. It was one of the sights of the town, when the craggy heights of the great dwellings lit from top to bottom stood out like a lighthouse above the heavy tracery of trees that foamed to their feet.

Elise had passed the first lock before Philippa had caught sight of her and was actually sure of her identity with the vision she had been following all day. A steamer passed upwards; in the wash of it the frail cockle-shell was churned and tossed. Past the sedges at the bend she could see Elise rowing steadily. The sheep gathered round a feeding-trough looked up at Philippa as she passed, the half-champed mangolds in their mouths; the individual faces of them remained. There was the leap of a water-rat from the ditch where an old man with a broken umbrella sat catching eels.

Over across the river lay thin lines of houses, the yellow gables staring; it was Upham. Should she call, try to stop the second boat when it waited at the lock? It was

interminable, the banks, the oily drip of water, the shadow of the boats. It had gone on so long that her jaws were stiff, useless, silent. An invisible hand held her down, kept her quiet.

They were near the sea now and the wavelets lapped noisily, breaking with a little thud every now and then against the side of the boat. Yellow against the lead of sea and sky could be seen the gleam of sand bars with foam crawling in a white line above it. Pale along the western horizon showed a long bar of light, in it the crispy foam-tops seemed to have conscious separate existence. Yet sea and sky were changing; from that something alien to the human that makes them enemies, they were approaching nearness, kinship.

Philippa gained upon the boat in the bows of which Elise had sunk and now she could see her face. Sea and sky and sand bar were behind her.

At last Philippa sent up a cry for help, a cry that echoed like the call of a sea-bird, as she saw the figure she was watching drop into the water. In a moment she followed, skirt and shoes off, swimming with a rapid breast-stroke. The band of light was broadening, shining across the sea like a search-light. Then the body rose as the watcher had known it would.

"No, no," cried Elise, as Philippa caught her and sent up cry after cry for help.

They fought now, one for death and the other for life, by mere instinct, while with the lower brain silent, deadened, the higher worked alone. They knew at length that it was not for themselves, but for invisible lives that they struggled. There had always been division between them before, the all-pervading division of the physical, but all sense of it was going now in this wordless strife. They understood each other without need of words, as scarcely conscious of the deadening grip of cold, of the strain on weighted limbs, they felt but the cradling of the waters, the overhanging of the skyey canopy that seemed to come so close.

In Elise the fear of death was gone, along with the sickening ache of bodily horror. In her craving to give, she was one with the life that held her up, one with her son, with Michael, with Olivier. Some were in the flesh, some out of

it, yet the long years stretched before them all. For life was one; in the dead, in the living; in starving wretches, in the great and powerful. She knew it by the one life in herself and Philippa. Along opposing paths they had reached the goal, the final goal of consciousness, these two, in the sense of unity of life.

But one was deadly tired, and there was light ahead, strange light that came from the horizon, yet ended far away in eternity. Ended? Not so, there was no end.

It was beautiful to rest at last. "Kiss me, Philippa," she wanted to say, but could not. Nor was there any need, for Philippa understood that, as she understood everything now.

The yellow light of a candle threw its rays across the recesses of the worm-eaten four-poster bed; the violets and pinks of its patch-work quilt seemed as large as fields seen from a hillside above. There was the strong smell of imperfectly baked goose feathers from the pillows and the whitewashed walls apparently bulged inwards towards the bed.

Philippa awoke and looked up at Mrs. Pym.

"Lie still, my dear," said the old woman, "and drink this."

"And Elise?" said she, after she had sipped of the hot strong drink.

But she knew her answer.

"She was gone before they got to 'ee. They tried for hours, but she was too far away."

Yet to Philippa she seemed very near, for her mind was still on the levels they had found together.

"He's with her. Has been for hours. They brought 'ee both back in the *Good Intent* and sent for him. Doctor's only just gone."

Later on, when Philippa softly opened the door of the opposite room, Michael never moved as she entered, for his face was turned to the bed in the shadowed corner away from the light. So they remained, the watchers and the watched, till at length Philippa went over to the window and pulling aside the curtain, said:

"The morning has come, Michael."

"How did it happen?" he asked at last. "You tried to save her, that's all I know."

"I went to her in town, when I found she was not acting. Then, when I was asleep, she went away and I knew where she was going, as soon as I read what she had written. She wanted to pay for all the weakness of the past, by one great blow. She didn't know how to do it—any other way."

An extraordinary sense that her lips and brain were not her own came over Philippa now. She was being used, apparently, as an instrument to reach the denser brain of the man.

"She loved very much, Michael. At the end she knew more than you or I do about it. And what we call end is only beginning."

Standing side by side together they both turned instinctively from the shadowed bed towards the dawn that was now creeping into the room from over the sea. While they waited the light reached even to the bed with the old chintz-hangings.

But whether it was Elise or another who had spoken the words Philippa had heard as she sank into unconsciousness, she could not tell. They seemed in the air now, as then, though she knew they were not meant for Michael. She could, however, hear them quite plainly still:—"I shall live in the son you will give him, my son and yours, Philippa."

And, after all, the wealth that had been Madame Lesueur's came back to the foundry, for they found his wife had left Michael all she had once refused him, and the rest to Raymond Olivier. The will had been made just before the summons to Guise.

CHAPTER XV

LIGHT IN THE FAIRWAY

In the throbbing heat-gaze of the afternoon the valley was radiant with colour and the heather patches on Haldon gleamed in purple shadow between the darker patches of pine-woods. The light turned Mrs. Strode's white hair to shining silver-wire, as she bent over the glittering teapot in her hand, with three maidens demurely watching her under the tree in the garden of Snug Harbour. Once or twice a face looked down on the group in the garden, from the white room that used to be Cecily's. The owner smilingly shook her head when they asked her to come down to tea.

"No, my dear Cis," said Mrs. Strode, nodding towards the telegram that had fluttered on to the grass, "she won't come down—till *that's* over."

"You talk," laughed Cecily, "as if she had a bluebeard's cupboard up there. She's a queer woman, is Philippa, and it's more than I shall ever understand, how she could possibly keep such a secret from Michael all these months and months."

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Strode, "there really are so many things that are a mystery to you. A woman's wits don't grow clearer with domestic bliss. But as for Philippa, *I* understand her. She just wanted to prove to Michael that she really was the woman he needed."

When they saw two figures coming along the road they all rose together, while the children ran to meet their father. Michael was walking slowly by Louis's side in a mood of half-depression, it seemed. For he had dared greatly, by testing his own work and leaving the Familistère to its own devices for a few years.

Now he knew the truth; it was a fine business concern that he had created, it was the way out of the industrial trouble, for it supported its owners in comfort, even in affluence. Yet all the same the weight of a dead hand lay over its social activities. In the dwindling life of its edu-

cational, recreative side, in the refusal of the directing councils to enlarge the system of communal dwellings, he perceived that he had gone out of Nature's way.

Fourier's dream remains a dream on its social side, although it has been triumphantly realised at the Phoenix Works and elsewhere, in the economic ideal of co-operation which it upholds, the ideal that has saved Denmark's agriculture and will save England's manufacture, if we let it.

In answer to a questioning look, Mrs. Strode said at last: "She's waiting upstairs for you."

There was a curious air of expectancy over the group that stood in the doorway of the house, as they watched him turning the corner of the oak staircase, which he took two steps at a time.

"How uncanny it seems," said Cecily, "their marriage and then their parting so soon after. And why didn't she go out to him in America immediately?"

"She meant to, but then, you see, someone else would have suffered. They left it too late."

"And he doesn't know anything?" asked Cecily again.

"Not a word," laughed Mrs. Strode.

For a long while they sat round the tea-table till the light over the estuary of the Exe sprang up in the twilight. It was the Light in the Fairway, in the quaint phrase of the Brethren of Trinity House.

"How can they look out calmly over *that?*" asked Cecily again.

For the light shines across the bar.

"If," said Aviolet, "we all make as fair amends for what we've done amiss as was made out there, my dear, we may face Peter quite calmly."

"She ought to have faced it out," cried Cecily; "it is cowardly for us to leave before the time strikes the hour for us to go."

"And who knows," said Mrs. Strode's deeper voice, "what it is that strikes the hour?" It was a notable question, coming as it did from Mrs. Strode.

At the top of the staircase facing the corridor Michael had paused in hesitation for a moment; his run upstairs seemed to have taken away his breath, indeed. Then a door opened away at the far end and a tiny figure, round and sturdy,

tottered towards him. It was a boy, stark naked, with the curls bobbing on his head, and the fatness of him, aldermanic, giving a burly air to the tub-like sleekness of his trunk and tremulous legs. The light caught the hollow niche in the back of his neck.

Seeing a stranger he stood for a second and suddenly set up a wail. From the bathroom whence he had slipped, eel-like, came Mrs. Pym, a towel caught up in her hand. But the mother was quicker and her room nearer. She was very white, as she stood between the two, her breath coming and going rapidly, but Michael reached her before the wail of the boy had time to change into a howl, as he stood staring by, for once in his life unheeded. At length, as the child hid his face against Philippa's dress, she reached down a hand to him and whispered:

"Michael, he is ours."

So the problem was solved of why he had been allowed to wander over the States for so long. The woman's joy in her gift-bringing matched the man's peace in his home-coming.

Then there fell a deep silence upon the two, while the child, taking but faint interest in these proceedings, staggered away to Mrs. Pym who, with her wedding ring deeply imbedded in fat, had the pleasantest method of tickling conceivable.

"Well," said she to herself, "her's taken a long time getting 'en, but her's got 'en proper now, and no mistake. For when you see that look on a man's face after the first cheeld's took to his feet, you may take your davy he's caught right enough. For mostly when the chillern's come, a wife's no more to a man than a tail to a dog, something to wag with and finish 'en off vitty. And 'tis a poor dog that can't wag his own tail. But here you can't tell which is dog and which is tail, with these two. But there, they haven't seen too much of each other, and that's a wise thing, too."

"Look, Michael," said Philippa at last, as she pointed to the estuary where the gold was fading to purple, and the purple to grey, "there's the light in the Fairway."

The memories that clung to it were sorrowful, but they had no bitterness.

For both of the living and the dead, 'tis true that they sup not least well, who sup late.

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